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RECOLLECTIONS  
OF JOHANNES BRAHMS



RECOLLECTIONS  
OF  
JOHANNES BRAHMS

BY  
ALBERT DIETRICH  
AND  
J. V. WIDMANN

*Translated by DORA E. HECHT*

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## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

It is now more than two years since the world was made the poorer by the death of that great musician, Johannes Brahms, and as yet nothing in the form of a biography has been published in England. This fact, together with the knowledge that nowhere has Brahms, the composer, more ardent admirers than in England, has encouraged the translator to venture to offer to the English public these two series of 'Recollections,' which are the nearest approach to a biography as yet in existence.

Professor Dietrich, as a member of the group of young musicians who gathered round Schumann at Dusseldorf, was on most intimate terms with Brahms during the years immediately following the latter's introduction to the public. The letters carry us, with some regularity, from the

year 1853 up to 1874; whereas Dr J. V. Widmann, an eminent Swiss *littérateur*, is enabled to give us some details of the later years of the musician's life (1886-97).

Thus it will be seen that these two little works in nowise encroach upon one another; on the contrary, the one seems to continue and complete the other.

As these 'Recollections' have found great favour with the German-speaking lovers of Brahms, the translator trusts that, in spite of the disadvantages of translation, the book will give pleasure to the English admirers of the great composer.

D. E. H.

*November 1899.*

## CONTENTS

### *ALBERT DIETRICH'S RECOLLECTIONS*

CHAP.	PAGE
I. BRAHMS AND SCHUMANN . . .	I
II. LABOR OMNIA VINCIT . . .	30
III. VIENNA AND FAME . . .	51

### *J. V. WIDMANN'S RECOLLECTIONS*

CHAP.	
I. FIRST IMPRESSIONS . . . .	89
II. AN OPERA? . . . .	105
III. THREE SUMMERS IN THUN . . .	119
IV. IN ITALY . . . .	146
V. THE LAST YEARS . . . .	183





RECOLLECTIONS OF  
JOHANNES BRAHMS

BY  
ALBERT DIETRICH

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CHAPTER I

BRAHMS AND SCHUMANN

IN the autumn of 1851, having then attained my twenty-second year, I went to live at Dusseldorf in order to be near Schumann, for whom I had the deepest veneration. He and his wife received me with great kindness, and I soon became a daily visitor at their house.

Warm sympathy with the aspirations of young musicians was a leading feature in Schumann's character, and this explains the enthusiasm with which, in 1853, he welcomed young Brahms to Dusseldorf. Joachim had recommended him most warmly, and had also drawn Schumann's attention to the works of the young genius.

Soon after Brahms's arrival, in September of the same year, Schumann came up to me at a

practice of our choral society with an air of mystery, and with a happy smile said,—

‘One has come of whom we shall all hear great things, his name is *Johannes Brahms*.’<sup>1</sup>

And then he led him up to me. The appearance, as original as interesting, of the youthful, almost boyish-looking musician, with his high-pitched voice and long, fair hair, made a most attractive impression upon me. I was particularly struck by the characteristic energy of the mouth, and the serious depths in his blue eyes.

Brahms (then twenty years of age) was soon at home in Dusseldorf circles, especially amongst the artists and their families, and he was a frequent guest at the houses of Sohn, Lessing, Gude and Schirmer,<sup>2</sup> and also of the blind Fräulein Leser, an intimate friend of the Schumanns, at whose house many musical gatherings took place. His modest and winning manner soon gained all hearts.

I have a particularly lively recollection of one evening-party which took place, soon after Brahms's arrival, at the house of the hospitable and music-loving family Euler.

Brahms was asked to play, and executed Bach's Toccata in F major, and his own Scherzo in E flat minor with wonderful power and mastery;

<sup>1</sup> ‘*Neue Bahnen!*’ An enthusiastic essay about Brahms by Robert Schumann in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*.

<sup>2</sup> Eminent members of the well-known Dusseldorf school of painters.—*Trans. Note.*

bending his head down over the keys, and, as was his wont, in his excitement humming the melody aloud as he played. He modestly deprecated the torrent of praise with which his performance was greeted. Everyone marvelled at his remarkable talent, and above all, we young musicians were unanimous in our enthusiastic admiration of the supremely artistic qualities of his playing, at times so powerful, or, when occasion demanded it, so exquisitely tender, but always full of character; his wonderful compositions likewise took us by storm, so that there was a general desire to hear him again.

Soon after there was an excursion to the Grafenberg. Brahms was of the party, and showed himself here in all the amiable freshness and innocence of youth; pulling turnips up from the fields, and cleaning them carefully, he playfully offered them to the ladies as refreshment. On the homeward journey Brahms and I, the only musicians of the party, found ourselves alone together. In the course of conversation he told me how, when composing, he liked to think of the words of folk-songs, these seeming to suggest musical themes to his mind. Thus, in the finale of his sonata in C major, the words 'My heart's in the Highlands' had been in his mind; whilst in the sonata in F sharp minor, Opus 2, he had built up the theme of the second movement on

the words of an old German song: 'Mir ist leide, dass der Winter beide, Wald und auch die Haide, hat gemachet kahl.'<sup>1</sup>

These two sonatas were already masterly productions, full of power and imagination, and perfect in construction. He presented me with the manuscript of the second sonata, very neatly written and with a dedication. As a rule Brahms never spoke of the works on which he was engaged, neither did he make plans for future compositions.

We spent the evening of that day at the hospitable house of Professor Sohn, whose pleasant music-room soon resounded with melodious strains. Among the party were some young Swedish artists, whose charming singing of quartetts rendered them most popular in Dusseldorf society. Then Brahms followed with the songs 'O versenk' and 'Sie ist gegangen, die Wonnen versanken,' at which the enthusiasm of his audience knew no bounds. Most interesting also was his playing of Schubert's tender and poetical fantasia in G major. He also played variations out of his sonata in C major on the old song, 'Verstohlen geht der Mond auf,' with which he made a deep impression.

The young artist was of vigorous physique; even the severest mental work hardly seeming

<sup>1</sup> 'Woe is me, that the winter hath made both forest and heath bare.'

an exertion to him. He could sleep soundly at any hour of the day, if he wished to do so. In intercourse with his fellows he was lively, often even exuberant in spirits, occasionally blunt, and full of wild freaks. With the boisterousness of youth he would run up the stairs, knock at my door with both fists, and, without awaiting a reply, burst into the room. He tried to lower his strikingly high-pitched voice by speaking hoarsely, which gave it an unpleasant sound.

Once, when expecting a visit from Joachim, Schumann jokingly proposed our composing a violin sonata all together, and then letting Joachim guess who was the author of each movement. The first movement fell to me, the intermezzo and finale were composed by Schumann, whilst Brahms wrote the scherzo on a theme from my first movement. After having played the sonata with Clara Schumann, Joachim immediately recognised the author of each part.

The manuscript of this joint production was presented to Joachim, Schumann writing the following dedication :—<sup>1</sup>

F. A. E.

‘In Erwartung der Ankunft des verehrten und geliebten  
Freundes JOSEF JOACHIM schrieben diese Sonate  
‘ROBERT SCHUMANN, JOHANNES BRAHMS, ALBERT DIETRICH.’

---

<sup>1</sup> ‘In expectation of the arrival of their revered and beloved friend, Joseph Joachim, this sonata was written by R.S., J.B., A.D.’

At that time, it was in November 1853, I sent the following description of Brahms to my friend Ernst Naumann,<sup>1</sup> a musician at Leipsic :—

‘The most wonderful thing about Brahms is that, although he had lived in complete solitude in Hamburg and until quite recently had known nothing of Schumann, Chopin and others, yet the ground which these moderns tread is quite familiar to him. His compositions written already in early youth soar to great heights.

‘If his music does recall anything, it is the later Beethoven. Then there is a tinge of the folk-song all through his works, and this it is, I believe, which lends such a special fascination to all his music.

‘Add to this the inevitability and originality of even the most extraordinary and unusual combinations, which appear everywhere quite naturally, almost naïvely; hence the fine effect they produce.

‘Brahms is, as he could not, indeed, fail to be, a splendid fellow; genius is written on his brow, and shines forth from his clear blue eyes. He is twenty years of age, has already suffered much and gone through hard times; but he has learned much in this school of adversity, and his character has ripened early.

<sup>1</sup> For many years conductor at Jena,

‘This summer, for the first time, he emerged from his unfortunate surroundings, spent some months with Joachim at Göttingen, in order to attend lectures, and then came here to the Rhine.

‘He was very happy in anticipation of better times, and in the enjoyment of the present, with its delightful freedom.

‘He is now at Hanover. Joachim will not allow him to leave him. Schumann adores him, as I do. Ours is the heartiest friendship possible.’

I here add some letters addressed to me, as a proof of the desire felt by young musicians at a distance to make Brahms’s acquaintance. Joachim and I had written enthusiastically to our mutual friend Theodor Kirchner, a talented composer, who had an important position as organist and music-teacher at Winterthur. He answered me as follows:—

‘23rd October 1853.

‘DEAR FRIEND,—The fact that I am writing this, shows you that I am not coming. The cause is rather serious indisposition, which will keep me to my room for some time to come. I had plenty of time to be ill the whole summer, but no, it had to come just now, when your letter



and Joachim's, tempting me with delights unattainable, almost drive me wild. Think of me when you are happy! These shattered hopes have taken away all my zest for any further journeys this winter.

'Enjoy yourself to your heart's desire, but pity me a little. Farewell; let me soon hear something from you again.—Your

'THEODOR KIRCHNER.'

About the same time I also received a letter from a musician at Leipsic, with whom I was on intimate terms.

'LEIPSIC, *October* 1853.

'DEAR FRIEND,—Do write me your honest opinion about Brahms. I am extremely impatient to get to know him.

'If the Schumanns come here, he must come with them, the new Johannes or Messiah, so that we may all be baptised by him.

'What sort of a man is he otherwise? Oh, do write, please, write to me soon what you think of him. Is he still at Dusseldorf? What is the style of his music, and what has he written? When are the Schumanns really coming here? It is very necessary that it should be *soon*. Now, farewell, and answer all my questions.—Your

'v. S. . .'

Schumann had advised Brahms to go to Leipzig, in order to introduce his works to the public, and to play there. Soon after Brahms's arrival, I received the following letter from my friend v. S. . ., of whom mention was made above. He writes :—

‘LEIPSIK, *November* 1853.

‘DEAR DIETRICH,—Brahms is staying with me. He is a grand fellow! How grateful one must be to Schumann for having brought him to light. I reckon the days he has spent here among my happiest. He is exactly my ideal of what an artist should be. And as a man!—but enough! To you, who know him so well, I need say no more. I introduced him to Haertel,<sup>1</sup> Moscheles, David, and others.

‘Yesterday morning David was here, and played Brahms's violin sonata. Brahms then played his sonata in C major to him. David was struck dumb with astonishment.

‘This afternoon Marie Wieck<sup>2</sup> and some other people, probably also Rietz,<sup>3</sup> are coming to meet him. Unfortunately, he can only remain until Friday. However, he has promised to come

<sup>1</sup> Haertel, of the well-known publishing firm, Breitkopf & Haertel.—*Trans. Note.*

<sup>2</sup> Marie Wieck, sister of Madame Schumann.—*Trans. Note.*

<sup>3</sup> Rietz, a composer.—*Trans. Note.*

again soon, and I believe he will keep his word.

‘Brahms is now sitting on the sofa and writing to you.’

The following letter shows how thoroughly at home Brahms felt himself at Leipsic:—

‘LEIPSIK, *November* 1853.

‘MY BELOVED DIETRICH,—You have procured me a more than friendly reception here, and yet I can be so badly behaved as to completely forbear inflicting any letters upon you!

‘Do not be too angry with me; letter-writing is such a trouble to me. I have been here since Thursday evening, yet have spent only one night at an hotel. Our dear and honoured friend, v. S. . ., did not allow me to remain there any longer; he quite sacrifices himself for me.

‘Haertel received me extremely cordially, as did also Moscheles and David. If our master is still at Dusseldorf, please tell him about this, and say also how highly I revere him, how much I love him, and how much I should like to show him my gratitude.

‘Do you think Madame Schumann would take it amiss if I were to dedicate the sonata in F sharp minor to her? Do write to me on this subject.

‘Farewell, dear friend, and think sometimes of your

JOHANNES.’

He left Leipsic for Hanover, greatly cheered and gladdened by the regard and affection shown him on all sides, as well as by the interest the publishers took in his work. Before his departure he wrote to me:—

‘LEIPSIC, *November* 1853.

‘DEAR DIETRICH,—I hope to reach Hanover at mid-day to-morrow, and to spend the Wednesday there; then I must continue my journey; but could not you also manage to spend the Wednesday in the noble capital? It would be delightful! With such a prospect in store, I would even remain an extra day.

          ?          ?          ?  
          !          !          !

‘Your JOHANNES.’

The following letter testifies to the warmth of his friendships, especially for the Schumanns:—

‘HANOVER, 1853.

‘DEAREST FRIEND,—Many thanks for the songs and for many a welcome letter. I consider the “Romance of the Page and the Princess” your finest work after the trio in C minor; it is so romantic and full of genuine feeling.

‘I expect you are very angry with me, because I so seldom overcome my laziness about writing. Through the visit of the Schumanns, we had some delightful days here.

‘What shall I tell you about them? Since then everything here seems to me to have real life in it, and that means a good deal. For, as a rule, there is nothing living at Hanover. Give my warmest greetings to that noble and delightful pair.—Your  
JOHANNES.’

But how soon was this happy circle, which had gathered round the beloved and honoured Schumanns, to be most cruelly broken up. For the period was now approaching of Schumann’s first seizure with the sad illness which was to terminate in his being taken to Endenich near Bonn. During those dreadful days, I received the following letters :—

‘DEAR FRIEND, — For days I have been troubled by the thought that Schumann was dissatisfied with me on account of my last work, and that therefore he could not make up his mind to write and tell me his opinion, although this would be at variance with his habitual leniency of judgment towards all serious endeavour.

‘Now I have just read the *Cologne Gazette*, and all personal considerations have given place to all-absorbing anxiety for the welfare of my dear friend and master.

‘Dear Dietrich, if you bear the least friendship for Brahms and me, relieve us from our misery,

and write immediately whether Schumann's state is really as serious as the papers say, and give us news of every change in his condition. It is too sad, when miles away, to be in anxiety about the life of one to whom we are bound by all that is best in us. I can hardly await the hour that will bring me news of him ; I am quite dazed with the horror of it all !

‘Write soon.—Your J. JOACHIM.’

‘WINTERTHUR, 9th March 1854.’

‘MY DEAR FRIEND,—Never in my life have I been so deeply moved and upset by anything as by the awful news about our beloved and honoured Schumann.

‘I received the first information the day before yesterday through Schmitt, the conductor from Frankfort, whom I met at Wagner's house in Zürich. Since then I have been nearly beside myself with distress. I had already begun to write to you, when I received your letter. Thank you very much for it. Although the facts remain the same, I have now gained more courage, and still hope that God will not yet let that great and noble man be lost to us and the world. We should all be terribly lonely without him ; I, for one, should lose all pleasure in further endeavours. And poor Clara ! What must her sufferings be ! It is only the wonderful energy,

which noble women are capable of developing in the most terrible situations of life, which enables her now to bear all with such admirable strength and courage.

‘But if all hope were gone—I do not believe she could bear it.

‘I am also extremely sorry for you, for I can easily imagine what your sufferings have been of late!

‘How powerless we poor frail creatures are! We have to accept all as the invisible powers dictate—cannot alter anything—cannot help, even if we long to sacrifice our very life!—I am just on the point of leaving for Basle, and have to-day often been thinking of joining you, for I have no more peace here. I have given up all my usual occupations, which bind me to the outer world, for the next month.

‘Should anything occur, during the next few days, that I ought to know, oh, please write to me soon! Give my kind greetings to Brahms. Farewell, and give me some good news soon.—Your faithful friend,

‘THEODOR KIRCHNER.’

‘LEIPSIK, 15th March 1854.

‘DEAR FRIEND,—I have been daily expecting to hear from you, which is the reason why I did not write to you as soon as I had heard of the

dreadful misfortune which has befallen our beloved Schumann. I have no doubt that you have been deeply affected by the sad event. For were you not in daily intercourse with Schumann, and most intimate with him, not only as an artist but as a friend? What a blow, therefore, must the sad and sudden illness of your honoured master and model have been to you! As for me, I have done nothing the last few days but brood over the dreadful news.

‘Now I beg you to write me all the details of the catastrophe *as soon as possible*, especially whether there be yet any hope of Schumann’s ultimate recovery, how his unhappy wife bears this terrible blow, and particularly how you yourself are. I repeat my request for *immediate* news.

‘May God grant you strength to bear up bravely, and that I may soon see you arrive here safe and sound!

‘If possible, do leave Dusseldorf soon and return to Saxony.—Your faithful

‘ERNST NAUMANN.’

My reply to Ernst Naumann ran as follows:—

‘DUSSELDORF, 19th March 1854.

‘DEAR FRIEND,—I did not write to you immediately after the terrible event, only because my mind was in such a turmoil of agitation that



it was quite impossible for me to do so. Much to my relief, Brahms came as soon as he had heard of the catastrophe, and will probably remain here a couple of months. Grimm<sup>1</sup> is also here now, and Joachim was here for two days and will return in a few weeks.

‘You know how Schumann’s illness began, gradually reaching the terrible climax; but there is no doubt that the seeds of it have long lain dormant in him. His constant cerebral activity and absorption in the deepest subjects, his almost complete severance from the outer world, his leaning towards spiritualism, the steady growth of which filled me with dread as early as last autumn—all this has combined to unbalance this great and noble mind, and perhaps darken it for ever.

‘After the first violent attack of despair, his mind became more and more clouded; on my last walk with him, he gave me cause to suspect his dreadful intention; he had even gone so far as to betray his sinister thought to his wife; in fear and trembling we watched him—and yet, at mid-day of the 27th of February, just as I was about to enter his room, he succeeded in making his escape through a door that was usually kept locked, and reached the Rhine with extraordinary rapidity.

‘You know how he was brought back, so

<sup>1</sup> Julius Otto Grimm, conductor at Munster i/W.

spare me the description of details. That was the most terrible day of my life. I have not seen Schumann again since then; his condition remains the same; on the 4th of this month he was taken to Endenich, an excellent private asylum near Bonn. Madame Schumann receives news of him every other day; the last were most reassuring, for an improvement seems really to have begun. God grant that it may last; I hardly yet dare to hope; the doctors have observed some very bad, though not necessarily hopeless, symptoms.

‘Madame Schumann bears her terrible trouble with a strength of mind which excites one’s greatest admiration. During the first days of separation from her husband, it seemed as if she must break down; she became daily more and more pale and depressed, but now she is re-animated by hope; she works as usual, and finds in music comfort and rest for her mind.

‘Yesterday and the day before she took the whole of Schumann’s music to “Faust” through with us. We are with her daily, and I cannot now think of leaving Dusseldorf. . . .

‘Brahms has written a beautiful trio; he is a man whom one ought to take as an example in every respect; with all his depths, natural, fresh and cheerful, and quite untouched by modern unhealthy tendencies. . Grimm is a gentle, faithful

soul. . . . You shall have immediate news, if there should be any important change in Schumann's condition.—Your old friend,

‘ALBERT DIETRICH.’

There was now no object in my remaining at Dusseldorf. I wished to go to Saxony, first to my family in the Erzgebirge, as I was much in need of change and rest, and then to Leipsic, where several of my compositions were published and where I conducted my first symphony, which however remained in manuscript form. I saw Madame Schumann yet once more before my departure, after the birth of her seventh child. She was removing to another house, and was afterwards going to her mother at Berlin. Before she left Dusseldorf, Brahms hurried thither in order to help her to arrange her husband's library in the new apartment.

From Dusseldorf Brahms wrote me as follows :—

‘DUSSELDORF, 1854.

‘DEAR ALBERT,—Through my long delay in writing, you will receive some good news all the sooner.

‘Just think, a few days ago Schumann again asked whether he might not go to Bonn, as he had friends there whom he wished to visit.

Upon being questioned as to their names, he mentioned *Wasilewski*.<sup>1</sup>

‘Madame Schumann went to Berlin the day before yesterday. So yesterday we had to read the splendid news alone. Listen:—

‘On Monday morning Schumann expressed pleasure at feeling better, went for a fairly long walk, and ate well. After dinner he went into the garden again, and gathered flowers. He then sent a message to Fräulein R. (one of the ladies of the house), asking her to come to him. He gave her the flowers, and, upon her inquiring whether they were for her, asked her to send them to Dusseldorf. “But to whom?” asked the lady. Smiling pleasantly he replied,—

““Oh, I think you know that!”

‘We sent the flowers immediately to Berlin. I do not believe Madame Schumann will now be able to exist there much longer. . . . Grimm is still here, and sends you kind greetings. But stop, greetings remind me of something particular.

‘I recently made the acquaintance of Fräulein W., who, in the name of all Dusseldorf girls, sends you heartiest greetings.

‘There was a large gathering at the Eulers’, where they are very great at hero-worship.

<sup>1</sup> Wasilewski, conductor at Bonn, formerly a frequent visitor at the Schumanns’ house at Dusseldorf.

‘You were the only theme of conversation.

“O kehr’ zurück!”<sup>1</sup>

‘Now I have told you something about everybody. As for me, I must just say that I am very well, that I have, to my great joy, arranged Schumann’s library of books and music, and now sit there the whole day long and study. I have seldom enjoyed anything as I do roaming at will through this library.

‘Farewell; I will write to you if I should hear anything new about Schumann, especially if it were unsatisfactory.

‘I am very, very curious as to the next letter from Bonn.—Your  
JOHANNES.’

I cannot refrain from giving here some letters that I received from Madame Schumann :—

‘BERLIN, 21st July 1854.

‘DEAR HERR DIETRICH,—How long have I had it on my mind to thank you for your kind letters, but could not do so, as, until a few days ago, I was very unwell, and was still a semi-invalid when I came here. But to-day I must tell you that Heaven has granted me the joy of receiving a first token of love from my

<sup>1</sup> ‘Oh, return!’

beloved Robert. He gathered a nosegay. Then Fräulein R. (the lady whom he likes so much) stepped up to him and asked him whether she should send the flowers away; he said "Yes," and at once gave them to her. Thereupon she asked him *where* she should send them to, and *to whom*? He replied with a friendly look, "I think you know that!" I cannot tell you how excited I am, but until now I never knew how difficult it is to bear a great joy! I have to summon all my self-control in order not to let myself be completely overwhelmed by the feelings of hope, doubt, endless longing, which beset my heart; it often seems to me that my mind must give way, it is too much after all that I have gone through, and what is yet before me!

'I must just add that I am staying here with my mother, and shall remain another week. If I am calmer, I shall perhaps return on the 3rd, by way of Leipsic.

'I should so much like to see all my dear friends again, and you amongst them, but I cannot come to any decision as yet. But tell — of my joy at having once more received a sign of his love.

'Ah, what is Love—what endless possibilities does it contain!

'But enough! You see from my handwriting

how difficult it is for me to write, still I wanted you to rejoice in my joy, as you in faithful friendship have suffered with me.—Most heartily yours,

‘CLARA SCHUMANN.’

‘Joachim and Waldemar send hearty greetings. Yesterday I had also a kind letter from Brahms.’

From a letter addressed to me by Julius Otto Grimm :—

‘DUSSELDORF, *August* 1854.

‘He (Schumann) is no worse than usual; on the contrary we have more hope than ever. Ten days ago I was at Bonn, and saw him myself, and heard him converse perfectly sensibly with Dr Peters. It was ever his habit to speak but little, and that only when addressed, so his silence is not unusual; we must only be glad that he has been so long (several weeks) without a fresh attack of excitement. Last week he once had aural delusion, but only very slight.

‘Brahms has also seen him. This is how it happened. A week ago to-day, Madame Schumann went to Ostend for the baths. Then we two could not stand it here any longer, and went to Cologne, where we took a steamer.

‘We separated at Mayence. Kreisler (as Brahms then liked to call himself) went to the

Black Forest, and I to Nassau, in order to visit some friends from St Petersburg. But I had bad luck everywhere, found no friends, and, turning to the right about, went back to Dusseldorf.

‘Things did not go much better with Brahms. An attack of home-sickness, inexplicable to me, compelled him to turn back at Ulm, although he had really intended going to the Alps, and a few days after my return, he surprised me here. On the way back, we were both (that is each singly) at Endenich, and obtained permission from Dr Peters to hide behind an open window, whence we might see and listen to Schumann.

‘I cannot describe to you my feelings when I saw my beloved master under such sad circumstances. I could hardly control the trembling which seized me.

‘Brahms was similarly affected—however, I must say that Schumann looked very well; he has become somewhat stouter, otherwise there is no change in his appearance; there is *nothing insane* in his eyes, and his whole manner is the same as of old, so mild and gentle.

‘Madame Schumann writes quite contentedly from Ostend, she has even sent for a piano from Klemm’s, and will give a *soirée* the day after to-morrow. Fräulein Leser is also there.



But we long for this course of baths to be ended, and hope to be all together again in a fortnight. . . .’

Madame Schumann herself longed to get back, and did indeed soon return to her friends at Dusseldorf, but left them again in October in order to go on a concert tour, thus continuing her activity with most admirable strength of mind.

From Ostend she wrote me the following kind letter :—

‘OSTEND, 28th August 1854.

‘DEAR HERR DIETRICH,—I cannot let this day pass without sending you a greeting from afar. May Heaven grant you every blessing, and above all, give you good health and strength for work, so that next winter may, as I hope, be a fruitful one for you.

‘Perhaps you already know that I am staying at Ostend on account of the sea-bathing. I shall remain here until the 7th of September, and then return to Dusseldorf, where I am longing to be. It is only the feeling of duty that makes me able to bear it here; I was simply obliged to do something for myself now, and so decided on this. The result only can prove whether the baths have done me good; so far I do not feel any particularly beneficial effects. On the

whole, my dear husband is improving, but how slow is this progress!

‘With what a hopeful heart did I return from Berlin, and now, a month after, how little change! God alone knows when I shall see him again! Grimm and Brahms have both seen him, that is, listened to him, and found him looking very well, and with the old gentle smile on his countenance. He has also been several times to Bonn, but has never yet inquired after anyone.

‘Once more I received some flowers, soon after the first ones—he had himself gathered them for me—they were roses and carnations.

‘I ought not to write much, and so I must say good-bye now, although I should like to write much more. I hope to see you and my other dear friends at Leipsic in October. Fräulein Leser, who is with me here, sends you friendly greetings, and also joins me in wishing you all good! Once more accept my heartiest greetings, and retain also in this new year your friendship and sympathy for him, the beloved one, and for me.—Your

‘CLARA SCHUMANN.’

Half a year later I received news of Madame Schumann and her husband through a letter from Fräulein Leser; it was couched in a

more hopeful strain. Writing early in 1855, she says:—

‘After the great exertions of the winter, Madame Schumann had to give up the journey to England for this year. Thank God, she has always good news from her dear husband. He writes her splendid letters, perfectly clear and sensible, and ever more and more affectionate, which is probably the best sign of his progress towards recovery. You may imagine how happy his dear wife is about this; her longing to see her dearly beloved grows more and more intense the nearer she believes the goal to be. I only fear that this desire will not be realised so soon. The doctors are very careful, and will only allow them to meet when there are no longer any prejudicial consequences to be feared.

‘Herr Brahms has visited the dear patient. He was with him for four hours, played *to* him, and the “Cæsar Overture” as a duet *with* him. When Brahms wanted to leave, Schumann could not part from him; he accompanied him to Bonn, showed him the minster and Beethoven’s monument, and only left him when Brahms had to hurry to the station so as not to miss the train.

‘Brahms could not dwell sufficiently upon

the warmth and kindness of his (Schumann's) inquiries after everyone, and particularly how constantly he reverted to his beloved Clara!

'Madame Schumann sends you hearty greetings, and will write to you soon.

'I have written you all this in detail, because I know what deep interest you take, and how heartily you rejoice with us.—Yours, in old friendship,  
R. LESER.'

Meanwhile, in 1855, I had been appointed conductor at Bonn. Brahms was called to the Court at Detmold, in order to give lessons to some members of the ducal family, and to conduct a small chorus. Grimm went to Göttingen, where he soon became conductor. Madame Schumann continued to make long concert tours.

Unfortunately, after the apparent improvement, Schumann's condition became more and more hopeless.

The following letter was written to me by Madame Schumann from London, on April 15, 1856 :—

'DEAR HERR DIETRICH,—Enclosed you will find a long letter from Gisela von Arnim.<sup>1</sup> Will you be so kind as to hand it on to Johannes

<sup>1</sup>A daughter of Bettina von Arnim. (Goethe's *Letters to a Child*).—*Trans. Note.*

on his return. I have yet to thank you and Professor Jahn most heartily for the sympathy you show Johannes in his undertaking; it is a great comfort to me that he does not stand alone, it would be too difficult for him.

‘I can tell you but little good news about me. My heart is ever in Germany. I am living through dreadful days. I played at the Philharmonic Concert yesterday with a bleeding heart. I had had a letter from Johannes in the morning, which made me feel the utter hopelessness of my beloved husband’s state, although he most lovingly tried to represent everything as mildly as possible. I do not know whence I obtained the strength to play; at home my efforts were vain, and yet it went all right in the evening.—Think kindly sometimes of your

‘CLARA SCHUMANN.’

‘I believe that the enclosed letter is well worthy of consideration. Johannes is sure to communicate its contents to you and Professor Jahn. I have just heard something about cold water treatment for diseases of the brain, which makes me very anxious to try it for my husband. Please tell Johannes that I shall write to him about it to-morrow.’

On the 29th July 1856, death released the

beloved master! he, who in life was so unique in the greatness of his creative power, with the flawless character, depth of mind and sensitive feelings, the splendid man, of whom it was hard to say which was worthiest of admiration—the man or the artist!

Brahms and Joachim hastened to Bonn, and thus we three friends, walking close behind the coffin, accompanied the ardently loved and honoured master to his last resting-place.

Subsequently Madame Schumann once asked me to lay a laurel wreath on her husband's grave, and wrote as follows:—

‘Will you be so kind as to lay the accompanying laurel wreath on Robert's grave on the 29th. It is now two years that he is at rest! People always say that time heals wounds; I do not find that true, for I feel the loss daily more painfully, and no longer know any happiness in life.’

She also came to Bonn several times with her daughters, in order to visit her husband's grave; at such times I always accompanied her.

## CHAPTER II

### LABOR OMNIA VINCIT

I HAD a busy and interesting time as conductor of the Subscription Concerts at Bonn. The society of that town then contained representatives of almost every art and science, which lent a particular interest to our social gatherings. In Professor Otto Jahn, the excellent biographer of Mozart, I found a valued and paternal friend, with whom I had constant intercourse, and whose lucid mind and interesting conversation enlightened me on many subjects relating to art.

In 1859 I founded a home of my own, having led to the altar Clara Sohn, daughter of the painter, Professor Carl Sohn of Dusseldorf.

Our first spring at Bonn was made delightful by the presence of our dear friends Brahms, Joachim, Heinrich v. S... , Stockhausen, and for a few days even Clara Schumann. The two former proposed spending some months at Bonn.

Spring had burst in with wonderful splendour and beauty. This season on the banks of the Rhine has something enchanting about it. The

forests of blossoming fruit-trees, the luxuriant hedges of hawthorn on the banks of the river, the singing of the nightingales in the clear, summer-like nights, in the distance the beautiful outline of the Siebengebirge, still aglow with roseate sunset brightness—all this tempted us to undertake many delightful excursions. That was a merry and sunny life! And withal, rich in artistic enjoyment.

For after six years of silence Brahms had brought with him a number of new and splendid compositions, to which we were now introduced. There were the serenades in A major and D major, the 'Ave Maria' for female chorus, the 'Funeral Hymn' for mixed chorus, songs and romanzas, and the piano concerto in D minor.

He had employed the years spent in seclusion, partly at Detmold but mostly at Hamburg, in serious study, and besides those mentioned above had also written a choral mass in canonical form, which, however, was not published.

In one of the most beautiful villas on the Coblenz Strasse on the opposite side of the Rhine, the house of the artistic and hospitable family Kyllmann, we had frequent gatherings, always in company with Professor Jahn, for the purpose of performing chamber music, and of enjoying Stockhausen's delightful singing.

How keenly we relished these musical treats.



Our artist friends also came frequently to our small home, and at the end of this happy time joined us at the christening of our first child. Brahms, Joachim and Heinrich v. S. . . were the sponsors.

A few days later this delightful circle dispersed, our friends returning to their several spheres of activity. The first letter from Brahms found me at Dusseldorf, whither I had gone with my small family to spend Christmas. It ran :—

‘HAMBURG, *Christmas*, 1860.

‘DEAR FRIEND,—I really believe you will be at Dusseldorf to-morrow, and so my poor serenade will not be able to figure on your pretty Christmas table as it wished to do. But still it may risk it, and the good intention may procure it a pleasant though belated reception. I suppose you are already in possession of the “Bonn Serenade.” I, unfortunately, have not yet got it (from the publisher), and therefore cannot lay it upon anybody’s table.

‘I hear that you are determined to leave Bonn, and that soon. May I not hear where you are going? Do write soon.

‘Greet your wife heartily, and little Max Hermann Carl.—Your  
JOHANNES.’

In the spring of 1861 I was appointed con-

ductor of the Granducal Orchestra at Oldenburg. Although it was difficult for us to part from the lovely Rhine, our dear relatives at Dusseldorf and our many friends, still it was with cheerful anticipations that we began life in our new home, where we were received with great kindness.

As a musician I had good cause to be satisfied with the well-arranged institutions I found at Oldenburg; it was a pleasure to work with such a good and capable orchestra, and under a kind and highly artistic Intendant.

A few weeks after our removal, the following letter from Brahms arrived :—

‘HAMBURG, *June* 1861.

‘In order that my thanks for your letter, with which you recently gave me such pleasure, should not be longer delayed, I will write a few lines to you now, although in haste.

‘You may imagine how pleased I was to hear how contented you are at Oldenburg; I wish most heartily that you may long continue to be so. But, first of all, to answer the best thing in your letter, as far as I can say, you will find me here in July, or, in fact, at any time. But yet in every case please write me a line beforehand; a man with so few ties, as I am, can easily disappear over night. It would be delightful if

you came, and I think you would like Hamburg for a few days.

‘That my music has found a warm corner in your heart is to me a precious fact; all the more so, because I myself cannot believe that it contains sufficient worth for such a good musician as you are.

‘Please let me have your new songs; in fact, if you like, let me always see your new things. I would also have liked to have asked you for your trio, which I, unfortunately, do not possess; perhaps you have an extra copy.

‘I do not know if I have sent you my concerto? Otherwise it is at your disposal. Let us remain good neighbours, write occasionally, but the most friendly thing is a neighbourly visit, and that right soon.

‘Greet your dear wife, and little Max Hermann Carl!—In hearty friendship, your

‘JOHANNES BRAHMS.’

After the birth of our second child I received the following congratulatory letter:—

‘15th July 1861.

‘DEAREST ALBERT,—My heartiest congratulations! I hope all is going on well, and that the little maiden grows and blooms. I suppose she

will be called something like Thusnelda Maria Theresia?<sup>1</sup>

‘Thanks also for the songs. Amongst them I found some of last year’s dear friends, and was delighted with the simple, expressive melodies.

‘I am now living most charmingly in the country (half-an-hour from town). You would be surprised how nice it is here.

‘Perhaps I can take you out here with me, and in every case, my room in Hamburg at my parents’ is quite at your disposal. Anyhow, I hope it will be possible to make it pleasant for you here.

‘Herr Avé Lallement, who wishes to make your acquaintance, would like to know the date of your arrival some time beforehand, as, in accordance with that, he would arrange a projected absence from Hamburg. I should also like it, so as to be able to begin to rejoice in the prospect of your coming.

‘Hearty greetings to your wife, and do write and come soon.—Heartily yours,

‘JOHANNES.’

But meanwhile, as shown by the following extract from a letter from our kind friend Professor Jahn, we had gone through dark and anxious days in our new home:—

<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, we had omitted to give our boy the name Johannes, to which fact this is a teasing allusion.

‘BONN, 25<sup>th</sup> August 1861.

‘— Above all, I hope, dear Dietrich, that my congratulations may find you free from the serious anxiety about your wife, of which I heard with great regret and sympathy. How often it happens just when one has been transplanted into a new sphere, with all its attendant difficulties, that one has simultaneously to struggle against unforeseen troubles, as if forced by tribulation to take deeper root in the new soil!

‘I wish most heartily that no great sacrifice may be demanded of you, and that you may only feel the advantages of your present home. For what you tell me about your sphere of activity, as also about your whole existence, and what I hear from all sides sounds so pleasant in all essentials, that I can but hope that you may get to feel quite at home and happy there. I have also heard hints dropped of bigger musical works with which you are occupied; I wish you both a favourable frame of mind and inspiration, and then there can be no doubt as to the result.’

This wish, that I might take deep root at Oldenburg, was soon realised; this was mainly due to the extremely friendly reception accorded

to me and my family by all phases of society there.

It was at this time that I undertook the proposed trip to Hamburg, in order to visit Brahms, and stayed with his parents in an old and narrow street in the town called the Fuhlentwiete. Brahms himself, in order to be undisturbed in his work, was living very comfortably at the house of a Frau Dr Rösing in the suburb of Hamm. It was to her that he dedicated one of his most beautiful works, the piano quartett in A major. Contrary to his custom, he played me some of the sketches for it, from which I gained the conviction that it would be a work of great beauty and importance.

I slept in his room, which was full of interest to me. I was surprised at the extent of his library, which from early youth he had collected with untiring zeal. Some of these books he had bought from the second-hand dealers who frequent the bridges at Hamburg. There were some remarkable old things, amongst others Mattheson's *Vollkommener Kapellmeister*.

At breakfast I used to sit cosily with his dear old mother, whose kindness of heart was only equalled by her simple manners; her Johannes was always the inexhaustible subject of our animated conversation. She told me how, as a boy, he was passionately fond of

tin soldiers, and could hardly bear to cease playing with them; and that even now, at the age of twenty-eight years, he kept them locked up in his desk. Later on, when he was showing me his library and also the contents of his desk, he pointed out to me the different boxes of soldiers, saying he could not bring himself to part with such dear mementoes of childhood. His father usually left the house early, in order to fulfil his professional engagements as music-teacher and player of the double bass. I only remained a short time with the dear people, and used to spend almost the whole day with Brahms at his charming country retreat, where we looked through his newest works, going into every detail—an occupation which was to me a source of keen delight.

During those days we enjoyed the musical treat of listening to a charming female quartett, who used to sing Brahms's 'Songs for Four Voices' most delightfully, in the neighbouring garden. Brahms introduced me to them; they were the two Fräulein Völkers, younger sisters of Frau Dr Rösing, and their two friends, Fräulein Garbe and Fräulein Reuter. Brahms had happened to hear this quartett at a wedding—he was playing the organ—and had liked their singing so much that he had asked the young girls whether they would practise his 'Ave Maria,'

which he had just composed, which proposal they were delighted to accept.

This quartett was the beginning of a small choral society, as a few more ladies joined them. Brahms promised them that if they would appear punctually and regularly he would always provide something new for them to learn, for 'fix oder nix,'<sup>1</sup> was his motto. They also sang old Italian church music, which Brahms arranged for a female chorus. In the autumn the practices were brought to a close by a small performance in the Petrikirche. The following year he again conducted the little society for a few months, until he left Hamburg.

I had had an opportunity of hearing these four young girls at Dusseldorf the previous year. They were then, in 1860, on a tour down the Rhine with their brother, and came to Dusseldorf for the great Rhenish Musical Festival. In response to a request from Brahms, they were asked by Madame Schumann to sing some of his 'Songs for Four Voices,' one morning at Fräulein Leser's before a large gathering of musicians, amongst whom were also Joachim and Stockhausen. This they were most willing to do, and everyone was delighted with their singing.

After these happy days in Hamburg, I re-

<sup>1</sup> 'Thoroughness before everything.'



turned home for the christening of our youngest child, whom we named Clara, after our beloved and honoured Clara Schumann.

I was now busy with the preparations for my first winter concert, at which Madame Schumann made her first appearance in Oldenburg. Her playing excited the greatest enthusiasm, and everyone felt the charm of her noble and attractive personality. How happy were all who came into closer contact with her!

The succeeding concerts were rendered delightful by the presence of Joachim and Stockhausen, and finally of Brahms. It was thus that we saw all our dear old friends again in our new home.

I here call to mind another charming youthful artist who appeared at Oldenburg during our first years there; this was Fräulein Amalie Weiss, the future Frau Joachim. She came to us from Hanover with the highest recommendations, having there won all hearts by her wonderful voice and her noble rendering of the finest music; her sweetness and true womanliness soon aroused our sympathy and admiration.

With what interest did our little musical world await the coming of the young musician Johannes Brahms, who was now to make his appearance as composer and pianist.

Brahms's reply to my first invitation to Oldenburg ran as follows:—

‘HANOVER, 1862.

‘DEAR FRIEND,—I have been here since some weeks, and only received your letter *viâ* Hamburg. I am going home to-morrow, and am just writing you a few lines in great haste.

‘I am much drawn to visit you, and to get to know so many whose names I have so often heard mentioned as your friends, otherwise I would say no. So I shall come to you, and shall then stay as long as I can allow myself to be idle.

‘What shall I play? Beethoven or Mozart? C minor, A major or G major? Advise me!

‘And for the second part, Schumann, Bach, or might I venture upon some new variations of my own?

‘Of course you will conduct my serenade. We have played my quartetts a good deal here; I shall bring them with me, and shall be glad if they meet with your approval.

‘*À propos!* I suppose I must have fifteen louis d’ors remuneration, but would like to have it so arranged that if I should play at Court, that would be paid for extra. Money is very necessary to me, consequently my time is precious, and I am unwilling to allow myself to be tempted to concerts; but if *the one* has to be, the other must follow.

'Write to me at Hamburg, Hamm.

'Soon more, and excuse haste.

'Greet the wife, D. M. and C.—Heartily

YOURS,

JOHANNES.'

Shortly after I received the following letter:—

'DEAR FRIEND,—If possible, I shall leave here on Monday evening and travel to you by way of Bremen.

'Is that the most practical route? How about the further journey to Oldenburg? Does one simply get into another carriage?

'So I shall play Beethoven's concerto in G major. Have you got the parts?

'As regards the second number there is time enough, my memory helps me a good deal, and my fingers follow obediently.

'My second serenade was recently given at New York. As far as I know it was altogether the first performance since the pieces have been in print!

'It is beautiful out here at Hamm; the sun shines so brightly in my room that, if I did not see the bare trees through the window, I should believe it was summer.

'Write me a line about the journey.

'Greet your wife and the little ones.—Heartily

YOURS,

JOHANNES.'

Soon after this letter, Brahms arrived at our house. He was the pleasantest visitor imaginable, always amiable and unassuming, always in good spirits; a child himself when with the children, to whom he was devoted.

He was happiest in simple surroundings, and considered our modest lot most enviable. How often did he express his pleasure at being a witness of such happiness, and had circumstances allowed him to do so, it might then have been the right moment for him to have founded a home of his own. For he was much attracted by a young girl, who at that time frequented our house. One evening when she and our other guests had left us—we had been a very lively party—he remarked with quiet decision, ‘I like her, I should like to marry her; such a girl could also make me happy.’ She was a very nice girl, blooming, healthy, natural, clever and with a very active mind.

The night before the concert, Brahms delighted the orchestra by playing to them his variations on a theme by Handel. These variations are wonderfully beautiful and full of true genius; they close with a fugue that is perfectly fascinating, and that is saying much of a fugue!

His rendering of this beautiful work raised the enthusiasm of the members of the orchestra

to such a pitch that at the concert itself the performance of the G major concerto was simply perfect, much to Brahms's satisfaction and the delight of the audience! But a laurel wreath, which had been hung over his chair, he modestly laid underneath the pianoforte!

In his next letter from Hamburg, he wrote (1861):—

‘DEAR ALBERT,—Ever since I returned from Oldenburg I have wanted to write you a long letter saying how happy I was with you, and how grateful I am for all your kindness.

‘Now my thanks are just as warm, but rather late; well, you are not angry with me on that account, are you?

‘Stockhausen wanted to come here in the beginning of May. At his desire I have arranged several of Schubert's songs (“Schwager Kronos” and “Memnon,” for instance) for orchestra. So it is possible that we may ask leave to go to you for a rehearsal, as here that would mean much trouble and expense.

‘Otherwise I suppose I shall sooner see you here, for I hope that you have not forgotten your promise of coming. Could not that be soon? Everything is in blossom now, and out here at Hamm it is simply a treat to listen to the nightingales singing amongst the budding trees.

‘I am sending you some novelties; unfortunately, I could not find a score of the sextett. The “Handel Variations” (published by Breitkopf & Haertel), and the Marienlieder for full chorus (publisher, Rieter) will soon follow.

‘I often think of you, of your cosy home, and of all Oldenburg. Take my heartiest greetings, and greet all who were so kind to me.

‘Let me hear from you sometime or other, and I will write again soon and more.—In old friendship, your  
JOHANNES.’

The inspiriting influence of Brahms’s visit to Oldenburg was long felt there. At our own house, and in wider circles beyond, he came in contact with many people, who all appreciated his earnestness as well as the humour which frequently showed itself in his remarks.

In the following summer, 1862, I met Brahms in the beginning of June at the musical festival at Dusseldorf.

We arranged to go into the country together, and as we knew that Madame Schumann and her children were then at the neighbouring baths of Munster am Stein, near Kreuznach, we took up our abode a quarter of an hour away in a large and comfortable house at the foot of the romantic Ebernburg. Brahms and I worked industriously, Madame Schumann practised, and in the after-

noons, if we did not go on an expedition in the neighbourhood, we used to discourse sweet music to our hearts' desire.

Brahms here composed the first two books of his wondrously beautiful 'Magelonen Lieder.' They were the most lovely songs he had yet written.

It was also at Munster am Stein that Brahms showed me ~~the first~~ movement of his symphony in ~~C minor~~ which, however, only appeared much later and with considerable alterations.

At that time I wrote as follows to my wife about this sojourn with Brahms:—

'In the evening we spent hours at Madame Schumann's in listening to the most delightful music. She played a big sonata of Schumann's to us, and then the sextett of Brahms with me, and finally, Brahms played the most lovely bits out of his grand quartetts and other things.

'The longer I am with Brahms, the more do I love and honour him. His disposition is as amiable and cheerful as full of depths of seriousness. It is true he frequently teases the ladies by making joking assertions in such a grave manner that Madame Schumann in particular takes them quite seriously, which gives rise to most amusing discussions, though sometimes there is danger of offence being given, and then I step in as mediator, Brahms

liking to increase the misunderstanding so as to be able to end up with a hearty laugh at the ladies. It is this, to me, charmingly humorous characteristic which causes him to be so often misunderstood. He must be rather uncomfortable company for ladies who are indulging in sentimental moods (for instance, after listening to Madame Schumann's delightful playing); but that does not prevent Brahms from being very serious and quiet when it suits the occasion.'

When, after a fortnight, Madame Schumann left, we went to visit our friend Heinrich von S. . . , whom we knew to be in the neighbourhood. With him we travelled for about a week, Brahms being our leader. First we went to Speyer, and then on by train to Karlsruhe, where we visited some of our artist friends—Lessing, Schirmer, Schrötter, who had removed thither from Dusseldorf.

At last we separated.

Towards the end of 1862 Brahms wrote:—

'BASLE, 1862.

'DEAR FRIEND,—Now I am really *en route*, and it looks as if I shall really have to play before several audiences.

'I made a beginning at Karlsruhe with my concerto, and the people were so surprisingly



kind as to be quite satisfied, to recall me, praise me, and all that sort of thing.

‘Now I am writing to you from the Riggensbachs’ at Basle, where we talked of you last night. On my big tour I shall see Zürich, Mannheim, Cologne, and at Christmas or New Year, *you* at Oldenburg.

‘Do think over what we shall play together? Could we not venture my D minor concerto at the orchestral concert? We executants enjoyed it at Carlsruhe, and it seemed as if the public did not object to it.

‘For a quartett evening, I can with a good conscience recommend my horn trio, and your horn player would do me a great favour if he would do like the Carlsruhe man and practise the French horn for some weeks beforehand, so as to be able to play it on that.

‘I shall bring with me some new Magelonen and other songs.

‘In Oldenburg I shall have abundance of time to enjoy the pleasures both of friendship and of music.

‘Greet your dear ones, and do your best that my prospects at Oldenburg may continue favourable.—Right heartily yours,

‘JOHANNES BR.’

All this so pleasantly planned by our friend came to pass in due course. He wrote :—

‘HAMBURG, 1862.

‘DEAR ALBERT, — Your letter came to-day, and a few hasty lines must be my reply.

‘From about the 20th to 28th December I shall be at Detmold, and shall therefore come to you about New Year, play my concerto on the 5th, and then have time for everything imaginable. I have reason to be very satisfied with my journey, as in every respect it was pleasanter than I had anticipated. It really is a pity that I cannot overcome my dislike to this restless life, and have therefore resolved to give it up.

‘Now I have no time, so will tell you everything verbally.

‘Greet your dear wife, and *au revoir*! — Your  
‘JOHANNES.’

Everyone was deeply impressed by the horn trio, and by its originality and romanticism. Some years later, when we were wandering together on the wooded heights above Baden-Baden, Brahms showed me the spot where the theme of the first movement of this work came into his mind.

The piano concerto in D minor was one of the grandest of his youthful compositions. I have seen the original sketch of this concerto in the form of a sonata for two pianos. The slow

scherzo was afterwards used as the Funeral March in the 'German Requiem.'

Unfortunately, this happy time together was only of short duration, as Brahms was requested to play at a concert elsewhere; however, he promised to repeat the visit ere long.

## CHAPTER III

### VIENNA AND FAME

A LETTER from Brahms from Hamburg, January 1863 :—

‘DEAR FRIEND,—On Monday I am going *to Vienna!* At that thought I am as happy as a child!

‘Of course I do not know how long I shall stay there; we shall have to remain in uncertainty, but hope that we shall yet see each other sometime this winter.

‘The symphony in C minor is not finished, but a string quintett in F minor (2 V. Celli) is, and I should like nothing better than to send it to you, and for you to write to me about it, but yet I had better take it with me.

‘You shall have it presently.

‘Enclosed are my “Handel Variations,” the Marienlieder have not yet come.

‘The title-page of your trio is still unfinished.

‘Greet the Oldenburg friends.

‘I beg you not to leave me quite without

letters. For the present you could write through Haslinger, or Wessely and Busing.

‘Meanwhile I bid you, dear Albert, and your wife, a hearty farewell.—Your           JOHANNES.’

The new string quintett, that Brahms had completed before his departure for Vienna, was another masterpiece; ever grander, more and more beautiful were his ideas, as his Muse soared ever higher! This work is overflowing with evidences of inspiration and learning, but it is also characterised by a mood of greater asperity than is usual with him.

Later on it appeared in the form of the well-known piano quintett, and was also arranged as a sonata for two pianos, both under Opus 34.

I received the first letter from Vienna in April 1863.

‘DEAREST FRIEND,—Hitherto I have waited in vain for your trio and your photograph!

‘I shall probably remain here until the 1st of May; do send me the photograph of yourself and your wife.

‘And write me a few words, how you and everyone imaginable are. If you still intend your trio for me, you had now better send it to Hamburg, whither I shall soon go, drawn by my desire to see my parents.

‘Do write to me how long you remain at Oldenburg ; perhaps I shall run over to you from Hamburg.

‘I suppose you are going to the festival at Dusseldorf?

‘It just strikes me that I might send you my Marienlieder and four hand variations, which have recently come. And I also add some pieces from an Easter cantata of Schubert, which I have copied from the manuscript, also the complete text, which I beg you to be *sure* to keep, so that I may get it back again. These are not the finest parts of “Lazarus” ; on the contrary, I just copied the beginning and end of the first part.

‘This is what most of the music is like, and Simon’s aria—! Oh, if I could send you the whole, you would be delighted at such sweetness!

‘You can keep it until I go to Hamburg, then please return it with the text and your trio.

‘If you wish to copy it, do so, but only *for yourself*. Although they do not make any difficulties here with Schubert’s manuscripts, and I am not in the least pledged to secrecy, still it is really Spina’s property.

‘Do write a few lines soon.

‘With hearty greetings to you and your wife and other friends,—Your

‘JOHANNES.

‘Finally I enclose a quintett, which you can also keep until I come to Hamburg.

‘*N.B.*—I must beg you urgently for your photograph, for here there are no people who could make one forget one’s old friends, even if one were disposed that way.’

On the 7th of May 1863, his thirtieth birthday, Brahms returned to his parents at Hamburg.

He brought much that was beautiful with him from Vienna, manuscripts and pictures, and also all Schubert’s works, a present from Spina. Upon a letter from Stockhausen he wrote to me as follows :—

‘I greet you heartily, dear Albert! and am now able to receive the most delightful letter from you any day, as well as photographs of you and your wife (for which I beg you most particularly). You might perhaps send “Lazarus” to Joachim, but with a warning that it must be returned to me. Best greetings.—Your

‘JOHANNES.’

How glad we were to know our friend near us again. I wrote to him, sending the wished-for photographs, and received the following reply :—

‘DEAR ALBERT, — Many thanks for your

friendly greeting on the 7th May. Your photo and that of your wife are already on show next to the beautiful Madonnas which I brought with me.

‘I beg you on no account to try my quintett, but rather to send it back to me, so that I may touch it up, which, unfortunately, is very necessary.

‘Have you seen the variations for four hands?

‘Have I perhaps sent you them?

‘The Marienlieder?

‘Your trio looks very nice now, but how about the ’cello sonata?

‘The new bride has quite charmed me.<sup>1</sup> First, when we were strolling gaily through the wood, and then by her quiet dignity in the *rôle* of Orpheus! . . . .

‘For the present I shall live at Blankenese on the Elbe, two hours from Hamburg.

‘All sorts of tempting journeys are in my head. What are your plans for the latter part of the summer?

‘Meanwhile, put up with this hasty greeting. In case you write, which I hope you will do, address to my parents (Fuhlentw 74), and *N.B.* the quintett!

‘I kiss your wife’s hand, a thing I have learnt

<sup>1</sup> Fräulein Amalie Weiss. Chap. ii., p. 40.



to perfection at Vienna, and so farewell!—Heartily  
yours, JOHANNES.'

He agreed to our request that he should pay us a visit at once. Our friend, who had now become so famous, returned from Vienna with the old friendship for us, the warm tenderness for the children, and also the old humour and delight in teasing. Many youthful guests came to participate in the delightful music, morning, noon and night. Those were merry days! How much we laughed!

Hence the friendly memories of those days in his next letter:—

'HAMBURG, 1863.

'DEAR ALBERT, — I am sending you the promised quintett with the heartiest greetings to you, your wife, my bride and my brother-in-law,<sup>1</sup> and all good friends at Oldenburg. I myself am off to-morrow, straight to Carlsruhe, where the firm Levi will receive letters for me.

'I hope to be able to repeat my visit sooner this time, it was really too delightful, and I should like to write a long letter of thanks. I found my people all well; that and some music with Joachim were my only consolations.

'My sister, with whose fine steel pen I am trying to write, sends you her best greetings.

<sup>1</sup> Our children Clara and Max, aged two and three years.

‘Remember me to Herrn von D., and, as I said before, to all in and out of the house.—Most heartily yours,  
JOHANNES.’

‘HAMBURG, 1863.

‘DEAR ALBERT,—I hope that this, and what is to follow, will find you yet at Oldenburg, although I have so arranged that in case of need it could follow you to lovelier climes, the Rhine or the sea. I hope that the sea is not very necessary.

‘I took the quartett with me from Hanover, intending either to send or take it to you. Now, I cannot make up my mind to shorten the little time I have with my parents.

‘The fact is, I have accepted the post of choral conductor at Vienna, and must therefore go there in August.

‘Now, I should much like to ask you to give me some information that will be of use to me there. At haphazard, because I do not really know what to ask you, and yet am extremely shy of making my first attempt in this line at Vienna of all places.

‘Do recommend me some very practical oratorios of Handel, with which a novice may fairly safely make a beginning. What do you think of Bach’s “Christmas Oratorio”? I should like to undertake that. Have you performed the whole of it? In two evenings? Only parts of it?

After glancing through it superficially, the first two seem to me most practical.

‘Altogether, I beg you, as an experienced and highly learned conductor, to give me your advice.

‘*N.B.*—Handel’s “Alexander’s Feast” and the “Christmas Oratorio” are particularly in my mind, and I would like to hear anything about instrumentation, etc.

‘*N.B.*—What I should like best would be if you had the latter instrumentalised with or without organ, and could send it me to look at and study! Even if it were only a few odd pages, I could get to know the drift of it.

‘I should very much like to visit Madame Schumann at Baden-Baden at the beginning of August or end of July. So I want to ask you whether you have similar intentions, because in that case I should make twofold efforts to do so.

‘Write to me here.

‘And if, about September, there should be too long a pause in our correspondence, address to me at Busing’s or Spina’s in Vienna.

‘I hope to hear ere long.

‘Would not Dusternbrook, near Kiel, suit you? That would be exactly right for me!

‘Hearty greetings from my people,—Your

‘JOHANNES.’

Unfortunately we were prevented from meeting at any of the places proposed, as I had to undertake quite a different journey.

Meantime, in our happy home care and anxiety had entered.

Brahms had been extremely busy at his new post at Vienna, and had met with much success. He wrote to me from there, and I give part of his letter here, as, in addition to many kind words of comfort addressed to us, it contains much that is interesting about himself.

‘VIENNA, 1864.

‘DEAREST ALBERT,—How glad your letter made me! It was really a great joy to me! Take my most loving greetings. . . .

‘Let us endeavour to retain a fresh, open, and, if possible, cheerful view of the life which, after all, we must live. . . .

‘Your letter only reached me to-day, as it was addressed to my former lodging; I am now living at the Deutschen Hause in the Singer Strasse.

‘My winter is nearly at an end, and I must now make up my mind whether I will spend the next winter in this same position, which decision is very hard for me, although, of course, both academy and orchestra give me much pleasure.

‘In every case we must see each other in the

course of the summer, and I hope for a longer period.

‘I do not in the least know where I shall go, especially as my purse has always an impudent word to say on that subject.

‘In every case we can meanwhile resort to letter-writing to keep us together! I would like to spend some time at Baden-Baden, and certainly at Hamburg. I doubt whether my purse will understand such bold projects as Salzburg, Tyrol.

‘You want my G minor quartett? Have you got the A major? Otherwise, I would rather send you all that I have at once. The following are now to appear:—

Duet for alto and baritone,  
A psalm for female chorus and organ,  
Sacred songs for mixed chorus,  
Three solo quartetts, with pianoforte,  
amongst which several are familiar to you.

‘It is possible that I shall not remain here much longer; in that case I should go to Hamburg and see you soon. It is more difficult to know where to go to, when one is neither held back nor pushed forward!

‘Let this greeting be enough for to-day!

‘Heartiest greetings to your dear and good wife. Do let me hear again right soon, and do not rob me of my hope that I shall soon see the

friends in the North, whom for me no one here can replace.—In heartiest affection, your

‘JOHANNES.’

The autumn of 1866 brought us the great pleasure of entertaining Madame Clara Schumann and her daughter Marie as our guests, at the same time as Johannes Brahms.

During her sojourn at Oldenburg, Madame Schumann arranged a *soirée* at which Brahms played his waltzes with her as a pianoforte duet.

How delightful was the life in our house! Even the breakfast hour was interesting and, thanks to Brahms's high spirits, merry! How enjoyable and cosy were the evenings!

I still have a lively recollection of one large musical party, which was given in honour of the artists by friends of ours.

Brahms had brought with him the manuscript of the Hungarian dances for four hands. He and Madame Schumann played them at sight with such fire and brilliancy that it was followed by a general burst of enthusiasm. After all the musical treats, our art-loving host proposed a toast in verse to Madame Schumann and Brahms.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ‘Auf steilem Pfad empor sich winden,  
Auf Schlangenwegen zurecht sich finden,

In the spring of 1867 Brahms wrote :—

‘VIENNA,’ 1867.

‘DEAR FRIEND,—The sun shines so brightly—that is the sign that even for men of position and dignity the “holiday” is coming, on account of which you perhaps foolishly envy us the whole year. Now also the time is coming when for a long time I shall not know where to send a letter of inquiry, and that rouses me from my laziness about writing. Do let me hear

Starre Gesetze zu überwinden  
Ist Künstlers Müh !

‘Wird’s ihm gelingen ?  
Wird er’s erringen ?  
Hosianna singen  
Der Harmonie ?

‘Die Flügel heben,  
Zum Aether schweben,  
Im Himmel leben,  
Befreit vom Dunst,  
Und dann in’s Leben  
Sich wieder begeben,  
Es adeln, erheben—  
Das thut die Kunst !

‘Ihr, die Ihr gerungen,  
Das Schicksal bezwungen,  
Euch ist es gelungen,  
Besieger des Grams !

‘Das Gläschen es winket  
Der Wein drinnen blinket :—  
Frau Schumann und Brahms !’

word beforehand, how you are, and where you are going for the summer.

‘It seems I shall remain here at Vienna, Post Strasse 6, or address through Spina if you are ever in doubt as to whether I am here.

‘In the winter, I was an ass as usual, and accordingly gave concerts here, and at Pesth, etc., in the most lovely spring weather. In Pesth, the thermometer stood at 85° F. The result was in every respect so good, that I must call myself doubly an ass for not having profited by the opportunity to get rid of my “Requiem.”

‘Now let me hear how much better you understand how to give musical pleasures to yourself and others.

‘If you were going to Dusseldorf, I would almost like to offer my “Requiem” to you, for you to look through. Also almost ask you to show it to our Bonn friend Deiters, to whom I feel seriously indebted. Also to Pastor Von Noorden.

‘I read that you had performed my quintett and second serenade, but I should like to know more, and to have had the programmes in my hand.

‘And what are the Oldenburgers doing otherwise? First of all the wife, the children, and then the other friends.

‘Before you go for your holiday, do let me hear a word, even if only so hasty a one as this is.



Would you not like to see the beautiful parts of Austria? And also to come to Vienna at the same time? Now in this springtime it is delightful in the imperial city.

‘But for to-day only the best greetings for wife, children and everyone imaginable.—Most heartily yours,  
JOH. BRAHMS.’

‘VIENNA, 1867.

‘DEAR FRIEND,—My dilatoriness has prevented our letters from crossing for a second time.

‘In great haste: To-morrow I am starting with my father upon a short tour in Upper Austria. I do not know when I shall return.

‘Keep the enclosed “Requiem” until I write to you. Do not let it out of your hands. And ultimately, write to me seriously what you think of it.

‘An *offer* from Bremen would indeed be extremely welcome.

‘It is true it would have to be combined with a concert engagement. In short, Reinthaler would have to like the thing particularly, in order to do something for it.

‘Otherwise I am quite inclined to let such things be, for I am not going to wear myself out for it.

‘I am ready for anything from Christmas

onwards. Before that, Joachim and I are probably going to give some concerts here.

‘For to-day, only hearty greetings for you and all. Continue to write through Spina.—  
Heartily yours, JOHANNES.’

At the end of this tour he accompanied his father to Hamburg. From there he wrote to me again :—

‘HAMBURG, 1867.

‘DEAR ALBERT,—Would you now send me back my score the sooner, the quicker, the better, and make the most of this good opportunity for enclosing other things—above all a long letter!

‘I had the great pleasure of having my father with me for some weeks. We went a nice tour through Styria and Salzburg; just imagine what a treat it was to me to witness my father’s pleasure, he who had never seen a mountain, and had hardly ever left Hamburg.

‘Now I intend to remain here quietly; unfortunately it is not much use my making plans, as only that comes to pass to which the spirit moves me.

‘But I would much like soon to see my “Requiem” back in my own cupboard, therefore—send it, but not without adding words and music.

‘Heartiest greetings at home and elsewhere.—  
Your

JOH. BR.

‘POSTGASSE 6.’

‘HAMBURG, 1867.

‘DEAR DIETRICH,—Before the summer is over you must be reminded of me by a hasty greeting.

‘I can easily reckon how old yours is—for I was just in the desperate condition of having to give up a summer overcoat as lost and to buy myself another—when the long-lost one came, beautifully wrapped up in sweet songs and kind words; how heartily welcome was it all!

‘I am sorry to say I cannot serve you with a symphony, but it would be a treat for me if I had you, dear Albert, here for a day in order to play my so-called “German Requiem” to you! I enclose some newly-printed things.

‘Until now I have been living at Zürich in Switzerland. Now I shall stay here a little and intend then to return to Vienna. Did a book-seller ever send you, or rather your wife, Simrock’s *Children’s Book*? A woman never fails to notice such a thing, hence the query!

‘Here all are well.

‘Mrs Clara! I now look like your Albert to a hair! you may take that fairly literally! How can that be?

‘Were you at Dusseldorf in the summer?

And how is everything and everybody there?  
Do write a word.

‘Greet all in and out of the house.—Your  
‘JOHANNES BRAHMS.’

This letter refers to a time that Brahms had spent very happily and merrily with us in our home. It was in the beginning of the summer; we lived mostly in our garden, which we had ourselves planted and tended. All this had a great charm for him, and the hour spent over coffee in the summer-house with the children playing round him, was so much to his taste, that every chord of his amiable nature was awakened.

When we saw him again in the winter, he had like myself grown a beard, hence the playful allusion in the foregoing letter.

I had received the manuscript score of the ‘Requiem’ from Brahms, and was most deeply impressed by its beauties. I hastened to Bremen to show it to Reinthaler, the conductor, who, immediately recognising the great importance of the work, decided to perform it in the cathedral on the following Good Friday.

With what joy did I communicate this news to Brahms! What a prospect for the near future!

On the 4th of April 1868, Brahms came to Oldenburg in order to play at a concert. We

then heard one of his most beautiful works, the wonderful variations on a theme by Handel. His playing of them, as also of Schumann's piano concerto, was as usual distinguished by lucidity and poetical expression.

He remained with us until the rehearsals began at Bremen. The performance was fixed for the 10th of April. Our frame of mind became more and more hopeful the more guests announced their coming to the performance.

'Only Madame Schumann will now be wanting, but I shall sadly miss her presence,' sighed Brahms.

His desire was secretly communicated to her, and although the journey from Baden-Baden was long, she arrived in time for the performance, giving Brahms a joyful surprise. We saw her enter the cathedral on his arm.

At this first performance the solo 'I will comfort ye' was not yet in existence. Instead of it, Madame Joachim sang the air 'I know that my Redeemer liveth' from the 'Messiah,' and was followed by Joachim, who played Schumann's 'Abendlied.' How beautiful, how perfect were both renderings!

Never had the cathedral been so full, never had the enthusiasm been so great.

The effect of the splendid performance of this wonderful work was simply overwhelming, and

it at once became clear to the audience that the 'German Requiem' ranked amongst the loftiest music ever given to the world.

After the performance there was a select gathering of musicians and music-lovers at the famous old Rathskeller.

In addition to Brahms (whose father had also come from Hamburg), there were present: Madame Schumann, with her daughter Marie, the Reinthalers, Joachim and wife, the Stockhausens, Bruch, the Grimms, with Richard Barth, and ourselves—all intimate friends of Brahms; also Rieter Biedermann from Switzerland, the future publisher of the 'Requiem,' and many others from far and near, even one fervent admirer of German music from England—in all about one hundred persons.

I will only mention two of the speeches, which I wrote down at the time—Reinthaler's toast to the composer, and the latter's reply.

The toasts ran literally as follows:—

'I welcome this select gathering here to-day with feelings of great joy and justifiable pride. It is a gathering of an uncommon kind, its members having come partly to assist in the performance of a new work by a composer now amongst us, and partly to listen to the same.

'It is to me a peculiar satisfaction that it has

fallen to the lot of Bremen to have the honour of first performing this "Requiem."

'What we have heard to-day is a great and beautiful work, deep and intense in feeling, ideal and lofty in conception. Yes, one may well say it is an epoch-making work! Well may it fill us, who have heard it, with pride, because thereby we have gained the conviction that German Art is not yet extinct, but on the contrary new life has been infused into it, and it will grow and prosper as vigorously as heretofore!

'It was an anxious, a sad and mournful time through which we passed when we had laid the last beloved Master<sup>1</sup> to rest; it almost seemed as if the night had come. But to-day, after the performance of this "Requiem," we can predict that the followers of that great master will complete what he began.

'And it is to me a source of particular pleasure that I have been so fortunate as to have assisted towards a not quite unworthy performance of this work. But everyone who took part in this performance has given me his steadfast support, each one devoting himself to his task with eager and loving zeal, I might almost say giving himself up to it with enthusiasm, feeling that the work was something sublime.

'I know that you all rejoice with me in the

<sup>1</sup> Robert Schumann.

fact that we have the author of this splendid work sitting amongst us, and you will willingly drink with me to the health of the composer — *Brahms!*'

Simply and modestly Brahms replied,—

'If I now allow myself to speak a couple of words, I must preface them with the remark that I have not the gift of speech at my command. But there are so many in this company to whom I would like to say a word of thanks, so many dear friends who have shown me kindness, and especially is that the case with my honoured friend Reinthaler, who has devoted himself with untiring zeal to the study of my "*Requiem*." Therefore I lay my thanks for all at his feet, and call for three cheers for Herr Reinthaler!'

An atmosphere of great enthusiasm prevailed the whole evening.

The work was repeated after a few weeks, on the 27th of April, once more under Reinthaler's direction, but this time not in the cathedral. I myself gave the '*Requiem*' twice at Oldenburg.

Brahms came again in the summer in order to make some excursions in the neighbourhood with us and the Reinthalers. One morning we went together to Wilhelmshafen, as Brahms wished to see the great naval port.

On the way thither our friend, who was usually



so lively, was quiet and serious. He told us that early that morning (he always rose betimes) he had found Holderlin's Poems in the bookcase, and been most deeply moved by the 'Song of Destiny.' When later in the day, after having wandered about and seen everything of interest, we sat down by the sea to rest, we discovered Brahms at a great distance, sitting alone on the beach and writing.

These were the first sketches for the 'Song of Destiny' which soon appeared. A trip to the woods was given up; Brahms hurried back to Hamburg to devote himself entirely to work.

He had also spoken to us about a very curious text for an opera; however, he never carried out this idea.

True to his custom of always letting me see his new compositions, in the year 1869 he sent me his cantata 'Rinaldo,' adding the following lines:—

'LICHTENTHAL, near BADEN-BADEN, 1869.

'DEAR DIETRICH,—Instead of the letter that ought to have been written long ago, read the score. I heard recently of the little trip you took to the north (Greisswald, etc.).

'You have given me the greatest pleasure by the dedication of your symphony! If only it is not withheld from us too long. . . .

'Some waltzes of mine will shortly appear, this

time *with vocal parts*. Write to me how you like them.

‘I have been at Baden all the summer, and shall wait here for Julie Schumann’s wedding. Greet your wife and children, and everyone imaginable, and let me hear from you sometime.—Meanwhile, yours in haste,

‘JOH. BRAHMS.’

The symphony which I had dedicated to him was completed; but his acknowledgment of it was long in coming. At last in February 1870 he wrote :—

‘DEAR FRIEND,—I have delayed the thanks for your symphony too long. You give me great pleasure with your delightful present, and it could only have been still more delightful had an orchestra brought it and played it to me.

‘It would indeed have been a treat to me to have seen the Leipsic public pleased with this, our symphony.

‘When shall I hear it? The journey to you seems to me always longer. . . .

‘Special thanks to your dear wife for her kind and chatty letter.

‘I am sending you my “Rhapsody”; the conductors will not exactly fight for the Opus; but it will perhaps be a satisfaction to you to see that I do no *always* write in such a frivolous time as  $\frac{3}{4}$ !

‘Your sonata is frequently played at my house, and I am now very curious as to your new opera. We are just having a luxurious musical time here. *Rubinstein*, *Meistersinger* and what not! For to-day these hasty lines must suffice to express my thanks. More soon.

‘Have you already sold your “*Bittgesang*”? *Reinthaler* was loud in its praise.

‘Greet your wife and the future *prima donna*, and everyone else in dear Oldenburg who will allow themselves to be greeted.—Heartily yours,  
‘JOHANNES.’

This ‘*Rhapsody*’ was the truest expression of his deepest feelings. Brahms himself once said to me that he loved this work so much that he had to lay it under his pillow at night, in order always to have it near him.

~~It is indeed~~ fascinating, if it is possible to apply such a word to what moves one’s inmost being, and completely overwhelms one with its beauties. It is perfectly wonderful. It seems to affect one like a revelation of one’s highest aspirations, and enthralls the soul to such an extent that it is impossible ever to forget it. One lives in a state of perpetual longing to hear it again.

Brahms visited us a few more times. One evening at a *Quartett Soirée* he gave the

audience a delightful surprise, as he had come to us unexpectedly. His own quartett in A major was about to be performed, and he took my place at the piano. That was a treat for the Oldenburgers.

Almost every year Brahms went to Lichtenthal (Baden-Baden), in order to be near Madame Schumann, and frequently remained there for as long as ten weeks at a time.

When in 1872 I went to Bonn to conduct my D minor symphony, my friend V. Wasilewski, the conductor, showed me a lengthy and beautifully-written manuscript of a violin part, and asked me whether I had seen the writing before. I immediately recognised it as Brahms's handwriting in early years. We deeply regretted that the piano part of it could not be found. It must have been a portion of that violin sonata which was lost at Liszt's house in Weimar in 1852.

In 1871 the second performance of the 'Requiem' took place at Bremen, together with the Hallelujah (first chorus of the 'Triumphlied'). The former was now enriched by the wonderful solo, 'I will comfort ye.'

Reinthaler asked me for the assistance of as many Oldenburg singers as possible for the performance of the mighty Hallelujah chorus. Brahms also wrote to me on this subject as follows :—

‘VIENNA, February 1871.

‘DEAR FRIEND,—This note is only as a hand knocking at your door. I am just going to enter, and must be prepared for a cross face !

‘Forgive me, I am even lazier in letter-writing than in the writing of music—you will learn with horror what that is.

‘I am going to Germany soon, and almost dread it. We out here have got into the way of only rejoicing over all that happens ; but to you the stern and solemn side of this great and important time has appeared in terrible proximity, so that I expect you look at it from a different point of view.

‘In every case we shall see each other at Bremen. You probably know that I have sent the first chorus of a Triumphlied to Reinthaler. He complains of the weakness of his choir. Could you not find some volunteers at Oldenburg who would sing in the eight-voiced forte ?

‘It is not difficult, *only forte*.

‘Now, dear fellow, do not be angry with me when I come, greet the wife, your children, and everybody in the town right heartily.—  
From your  
JOH. BRAHMS.’

Of course we went again to Bremen in order to get to know the new work ; it was over-

whelming and grand, and met also with enormous success at the festival at Dusseldorf.

During the following years Brahms came but seldom to North Germany. Towards the end of 1873 he was once more our guest. The following year he wrote :—

‘VIENNA, 1874.

‘DEAR FRIEND,—I am very very sorry, but you come too late! I have already made so many promises, and shall not be going to your neighbourhood.

‘If you had only written earlier, I should have arranged it with Bremen, Hanover, etc., for *seriously* I should so much like to come to you again! Now, unfortunately, I can do nothing, except, above all, greet your daughter most warmly. You know that there still exists a certain relation between us, not looked upon as unimportant by the mother!<sup>1</sup> Then go on greeting anyone who is so kind as to remember me. You might have written something about yourself.—With heartiest greeting, your J. BRAHMS.’

Brahms spent the summers of the years 1875-77 at an idyllic spot at Ziegenhausen near Heidelberg. He invited me to visit him there, which I did, and saw his latest works, though I do not now distinctly remember which they were.

<sup>1</sup> One of his usual jokes.

In 1879 we met at Frankfort for the first performance of my opera, 'Robin Hood.' It was then that we heard his splendid violin concerto played by Heermann at Madame Schumann's house. He went to Bremen from Frankfort, in order to conduct the third performance of his 'Requiem.'

In later years he remained at Vienna, only making a yearly trip to Italy; to the North he came but seldom.

But yet in 1884 we were once more to have the great pleasure of seeing him at Oldenburg. He played at a concert at which only his own works were performed. He announced his coming in the following postcard:—

'DEAR FRIEND,—Your letter gave me particular pleasure, for I was afraid the time might be very inconvenient to you, and you would think me unfriendly. Well, I am coming for the 19th of December, and am looking forward with great pleasure to the new house and dear old people. A Brahms evening is not exactly to my taste, but I like something like the "Liebeswalzer" in the programme. Perhaps at the close you will give a decent piece by a decent musician!

'But everything just as you like it. With best greetings.—Your  
JOH. BRAHMS.'

Meanwhile we had bought a charming house, and were delighted at the thought of being able to receive our friend there.

We spent the first evening quietly at home. The following day, when we were sitting at dinner, the door opened, and, to our great surprise, in stepped some dear friends from Bremen, seven in number, amongst them Hermine Spiess,<sup>1</sup> whose singing Brahms had accompanied the previous evening at Bremen. They all wished to be present at the concert at Oldenburg, Fräulein Spiess even to sing four songs of Brahms': 'Die Mainacht,' 'Therese,' 'Minnelied' and 'Vergebliches Ständchen'—what a welcome surprise for the audience!

The following works were performed:— 'Tragic Overture,' the 'Concerto in B major,' and the 'Symphony, No. 3,' all of which created a deep impression. These were followed by the 'Liebeslieder-Walzer,' the sweetest and most charming pieces imaginable, and the songs which, delightfully sung by the fêted artist, Hermine Spiess, aroused a very storm of enthusiasm.

We spent a very merry evening with our dear visitors. After her return home, Hermine Spiess wrote as follows to my daughter:—

<sup>1</sup> A well-known singer.



‘WIESBADEN, 29th December 1884.

‘My thoughts, dearest Clärchen, are still full of Oldenburg and Bremen, and I can hardly bear to tear myself away from these delightful memories.

‘What a series of wonderful impressions have I received. That must last a long time. What I value most particularly is to have now enjoyed Brahms *as a man*. How charming he was with us when we were making and guessing riddles. What delightful hours we spent in your congenial home! For me, that was the happiest day of the whole journey. Of course I now only play Brahms the live-long day. It is a real rest for me to make music for my own pleasure after all the compulsory music on the platform. At Christmas I received all Brahms’s works, and am now really revelling in these lovely things.’

Two years later I received the following cards from Brahms :—

‘DEAR ALBERT,—Your letter gave me much pleasure, and if I were not starting for Italy to-day, I would take a proper sheet of note-paper to answer it. But now I can only thank you quite briefly, and congratulate you on your new works, the new doctor,<sup>1</sup> etc.

<sup>1</sup> Our future son-in-law.

‘Do come to Dusseldorf! I am not likely to go to Hamburg. For to-day only best greetings to you and yours, and also a few more.—Heartily yours,  
J. BRAHMS.’

‘WIEDEN, near VIENNA.

‘DEAR FRIEND,—Your greeting found me here, and I thank you warmly for the great pleasure you gave me.

‘All my thoughts were first on the Annanasberg<sup>1</sup> and then with you. Happy in the recollection of days spent together, and in the thought of how comfortable and pleasant your life now is.

‘I have no notion where I shall go to this summer, but Cologne is almost out of the question.’

‘Heartiest greetings to you and yours, whose number seems ever on the increase.—  
Your own  
J. BRAHMS.’

At this epoch of our life our happiness seemed at its height! Then came a terrible blow, almost overwhelming us.

The letters we received from Brahms at this period, as well as in earlier days of trouble, are of too intimate a nature to admit of publication, although they are the best witnesses of

<sup>1</sup> In 1853 Brahms and I used always to breakfast at the Annanasberg in the Hofgarten at Dusseldorf.

the beauty of his character, and the depth and tenderness of his affections.

In 1889 Brahms wrote to our daughter, two years after her marriage:—

‘VIENNA, 1889.

‘DEAR MRS —, I must tell you that your letter gave me quite exceptional pleasure.

‘Accept for yourself and all whom it concerns my heartiest congratulations on the little daughter of the 7th of May.

‘That is a very nice day of the year,<sup>1</sup> and I hope that you may all long rejoice over its return, and over the gift that it has brought you this time.

‘I was very glad of the good news concerning your dear father, and also of your charming description of your dear little ones.

‘From other quarters I have also heard cheering and reassuring accounts of your dear father.

‘How grateful I should be to you or your mother, if you would send me a little letter with a few details.

‘Do give me this pleasure soon.

‘Thanking you again most warmly, and with hearty greetings to you and your dear parents.—  
Yours most sincerely, J. BRAHMS.’

<sup>1</sup> Namely, Brahms’s own birthday.

Here these pages must end; perhaps they may prove stepping-stones for an exhaustive biography of the great and never-to-be-forgotten Master, which I hope will soon be written by a worthy pen.

Whilst arranging these letters, I have again lived through bygone days, and once more revived all those delightful memories which for us and a large circle of friends are centred in the name of Brahms. May his true self have been in some measure revealed to the great crowd of his admirers by means of this little book, so that they may not fail to discern in the consummate artist, the noble and faithful man. If that has been achieved by means of these pages, then I may deem myself happy to have done my part towards the honour and glory of Johannes Brahms.



RECOLLECTIONS  
OF  
JOHANNES BRAHMS  
BY  
J. V. WIDMANN



•

‘Stelle her der goldnen Tage  
Paradiese noch einmal.’

GOETHE, *Rinaldo*.

•





RECOLLECTIONS OF  
JOHANNES BRAHMS

BY

J. V. WIDMANN.

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CHAPTER I

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

ALTHOUGH ours was a very musical household, in which, with the help of friends from the neighbouring town of Basle, oratorios were frequently sung to a pianoforte accompaniment and other musical performances arranged, still all the years of my childhood and youth in the vicarage of Liestal passed without my having heard the name of Brahms.

My parents, both Viennese, cultivated exclusively the music of the old classical masters. Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven and Schubert were their household gods; they could even claim to have had a slight personal connection with the two last-named.

The instrument upon which my mother used to improvise in her old age (as she had done in her girlhood at Mödling, when Beethoven once growled out a word of encouragement, a fact she always remembered with pride) was the grand piano made by Graf for Beethoven, with exceptionally powerful strings on account of his deafness, and which stood in his room till his death.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes my father, after playing on his Maggini violin or singing some of Schubert's songs with his fine bass voice, would recall the fact that Schubert himself had noticed his good voice and musical ability when a boy, and had invited him to sing in the great church festivals; for Schubert occasionally assisted his father at the school in the Viennese suburb of Lichtenthal.

A sequence of strange events had led my father from the monastery of Heiligenkreuz to the pulpit of a Protestant church in a small Swiss town. And hence, having been obliged to turn their backs on their beloved Vienna, my parents' love for those great musicians and for the city of their happiest memories was so intermingled, that they were quite content to completely ignore the further development of music, or where that was impossible—as was the case with Richard Wagner's music-dramas—they had only words

<sup>1</sup> Now in the Beethoven Museum at Bonn.

of mistrust or a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders.

It was owing to these circumstances that, until about the year 1865, I had never even heard the name of Brahms; although he was then already far on the path towards the attainment of that fame predicted for him by Robert Schumann. On my telling him this, many years later, Brahms replied that I ought to consider myself fortunate in having passed my youth in the musically conservative atmosphere of my home, and to have been thus early imbued with the works of the great masters of the past.

During this conversation the musical treasures left me by my parents were lying on the table before us: two very interesting autographs of Beethoven (one with music), old pianoforte scores of operas by Mozart and Cimarosa, first editions of Schubert's songs, also faded old programmes of concerts given in Vienna in 1820 and even earlier. With what enjoyment did Brahms scan the pages of such scores as 'Don Juan' in an undated edition, 'chez Tranquillo Mollo, Vienne,' or the Collection of Songs for a Bass Voice 'bey Diabelli et Comp. Graben, Wien no 1133,' etc. It also pleased him particularly to see that in these editions the old treble, alto and tenor clefs

were still used; whilst, from the numerous corrections made by my parents, he perceived what excellent musicians they must have been.

I offered Brahms some of the programmes of concerts at which first performances of works of Beethoven had taken place; he hesitated to accept them. It was only after I had reminded him of his approaching return to Vienna, and remarked that if he took these old Viennese programmes back to the city of their origin it would be as if the picture of Diana were restored to Greece from Scythia that he smilingly consented.

But Fate had decreed that I was to be led to modern music and to Brahms, if not by my beloved parents, yet through one as near and dear to me—my future wife, who was from Winterthur.

Here I may be allowed to quote from what Hans von Bülow wrote about the musical life of Winterthur as early as 1853. In an article which ran through several numbers of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* he says: 'The small town of Winterthur in Switzerland, thanks to the artistic efforts of such intelligent and gifted men as Theodor Kirchner and Karl Eschmann, can boast of a more real and intense musical life than that to which Munich, if it continues on its

present course, will ever attain. Winterthur is by several decades more advanced than Munich ; and is a musical Aranjuez compared to this dead Madrid.'<sup>1</sup>

When in 1865, in consequence of my marriage, I went to live in Winterthur, Kirchner had already removed to Zürich. But Hermann Goetz, the future successful composer of 'The Taming of the Shrew,' was his worthy successor as organist and conductor, and upheld the good traditions of his predecessor.

I thus found myself suddenly transplanted into quite a new musical atmosphere, of which, even during the years I spent at the universities of Heidelberg and Jena, I had hitherto been in complete ignorance. I was above all fascinated by the poetry and romanticism of Robert Schumann, which seemed to reveal to me a world full of hitherto unknown beauties. The fact that at this time I also became better acquainted with the works of Bach, combined to make this an important epoch in my life.

In that winter (1865) I saw and heard Brahms for the first time in a concert in which he and Kirchner played alternately ; a young violinist, Fr. Hegar, from Zürich, taking part in the performance, which thus had the character of a chamber-concert.

<sup>1</sup> Also published in H. von Bülow's *Letters*. Vol. ii., 1850-1892.

Both by his personal appearance and powerful playing, which was very different from a purely technical display, Brahms, then in his thirty-third year, at once impressed me as a strong personality. The short, square figure, the almost sandy-coloured hair, the protruding under-lip which lent a cynical expression to the beardless and youthful face, was striking and hardly prepossessing; but yet the total impression was one of consummate strength, both physical and moral. The broad chest, the herculean shoulders, the powerful head which he threw back energetically when playing, the fine thoughtful brow shining as with an inward light, and the two Teutonic eyes, with the wonderful fiery glance, softened only by the fair eyelashes—all betrayed an artistic personality replete with the spirit of true genius. In his countenance there lay such a promise of victory, such radiating cheerfulness of a mind revelling in the exercise of its power—that, as I watched the young musician, the words of Iphigenia on the Olympian gods involuntarily occurred to me,—

‘But in feasts everlasting,  
Around the gold tables  
Still dwell the immortals.  
From mountain to mountain  
They stride. . . .’

I need hardly say that notwithstanding the



JOHANNES BRAHMS.

*From a photograph taken in early life.*





great impression Brahms made on me, I did not take advantage of my friendly relations with Hegar in order to approach him; but took his appearance as that of a beautiful meteor that had flashed across the horizon of my life. I still possess an old sketch book with which in those days I used to amuse my little step-daughters at tea-time by making rough sketches of the day's events; and among its leaves I find an attempt to reproduce Brahms at the piano that evening. When some twenty years later Brahms saw this caricature at my house, he observed,—

‘Well, yes; I suppose I *did* look somewhat like a doubtful candidate for the ministry in those days. But the difference is: *you* were one, and I was not. Ah, those were happy times!’

It was to Hermann Goetz that I owed the first personal acquaintance with Brahms. Years had meanwhile passed; among these Germany's great year of war and victory, followed by the building up of the Empire, which event inspired Brahms with one of his greatest works, the ‘Triumphlied.’ Completed in 1872, it was performed two years later under Hegar at a musical festival in Zürich, the composer (who, by the way, spent nearly the whole of that summer at Rueschlikon, near Zürich) being present.

I also journeyed from Berne to be present at the festival. Goetz, who had resigned the post of organist at Winterthur and was living in a pretty house at Hottingen, invited me with Brahms and Hegar to dinner on the 11th of July.

On our entrance we were greeted by the ethereal-looking wife of our host with the sadness that Goetz had that morning had a violent attack of hæmorrhage, and was constrained to keep his bed. We at once proposed to withdraw; but the patient had already instructed his wife not to allow this, as, in spite of his condition, it would give him pleasure to be a silent listener to our conversation from the adjoining room. We obeyed this request, knowing that Goetz made it in all sincerity; still, a shadow lay over our conversation, though we all endeavoured to hide the natural anxiety which the condition of our host caused us.

I must here remark that the fact that a real friendship never existed between Brahms and Goetz was not due to any want of appreciation or goodwill, still less to jealousy; but the contrast between the characters of the two composers was too great to admit of such a relation. The Königsberg musician, rendered over-sensitive by constant ill-health, could not bear the sharp, caustic manner of the robust and argumentative Hamburg master. This was already exemplified

in the first visit which Brahms paid Goetz at Winterthur. Seeing freshly-written sheets of music lying on a desk, Brahms stepped forward to look at them, saying: 'Ah! do you also sometimes amuse yourself with such things?' (It was a piece of chamber-music). Goetz, however, quickly spreading both hands over the manuscript, exclaimed in rather exaggeratedly solemn tones, 'It is my most sacred treasure!' ('Es ist das Heiligste was ich habe!') Whereupon Brahms, turning impatiently away, changed the conversation, and soon after took his leave. Both Brahms and Goetz repeatedly described this little scene to me, each finding something blameworthy in the words of the other. But to me it was clear that this unfortunate misunderstanding arose out of the incompatibility of character and aim of the two men. Brahms had a deep-rooted dislike to all display of solemnity, one might even say a sort of shyness of betraying his deepest feelings; and this occasionally—as in the case in question—made him burst out with something that sounded unkind, but was in reality only the result of a vain attempt to find a joking expression with which to cover his real feelings. Above all, no self-importance when artists are discussing their works together! This was a principle to which he adhered most strictly in connection with his own works, whenever he alluded to them,

which was but seldom ; whilst when speaking of the works of the great masters of the past, he always showed the deepest veneration, pointing out how immeasurably higher their achievements were than ours. But in intercourse with other musicians he did not consider sufficiently how incumbent it is upon a man, who himself lives in the full sunshine of success, to spare the sensitive feelings of his less fortunate brethren. And being a stern judge of all inefficient work, demanding both earnestness and untiring zeal in Art, it was just among musicians that he made many enemies, by the sharp or contemptuous words which sometimes came too easily to his satirical lips. But a man of such a noble character as Hermann Goetz, though hurt by such an unpleasant episode, would not allow it to affect his admiration for the great musician ; it only caused some shyness and reticence in his presence.

On the other hand, by journeying from Vienna to Mannheim for the first performance of Goetz's posthumous opera, 'Francesca of Rimini,' in September 1877, Brahms showed the deep sympathy he felt with the ideal aspirations and tragic fate of the promising young composer, whom death overtook at the early age of thirty-five.

But to return to that dinner at which our host, Goetz, could not be present. In the course

of our conversation, I had ample opportunity of discovering in Brahms a man of clear ideas and firm principles not only in all that concerned art and literature, but also in other fields of thought, showing that clear insight by which true genius is enabled to grasp that which bewilders ordinary mortals.

The Theological Reform Movement was then at its height in Switzerland, and to me it appeared to offer the best solution of religious problems; though the fact that I guided our conversation on to this topic may have betrayed the doubts which were already beginning to trouble me—for the desire to speak of such subjects usually points to an attitude of uncertainty and unrest.

Brahms showed his colours immediately, by denouncing this movement as a half-measure, unable to satisfy either religious yearnings on the one hand, or a philosophy striving for complete freedom on the other.

Gottfried Keller's<sup>1</sup> novel, *Das Verlorene Lachen*, appeared in the second and enlarged edition of *Die Leute von Seldwyla* in the October of that year; and this work did more than any amount of controversial literature to weaken the Theological Reform Movement. Much surprised as I was at this affinity of opinion

<sup>1</sup> Gottfried Keller, the most eminent Swiss novelist of the century, died 1890.—*Trans. Note.*

between Brahms and Keller, I knew what the pleasure of the former would be at finding the opinions which he had so long entertained, shared and so convincingly expressed by a writer for whom he had the greatest admiration. But it was much easier for the Swiss author, living in Zürich in close contact with this movement, and devoting much time and thought to its study, to attain such a clear and decided standpoint, than for the musician in his Austrian home. From this one may realise how wide was Brahms's intellectual horizon, how clear and healthy his mental vision, and how ripe his judgment of subjects having no immediate connection with his art.

The fact that at that dinner I had a rather heated argument with Brahms did not seem to make my company uncongenial to him; all his life he was an eager controversialist, and much preferred that a conflict of opinions should enliven the conversation, than that people, out of respect for his powers and achievements, should always agree with him.

From my pocket-diary of the year 1874, I find that during the three remaining days of the festival we were constantly together; and thus I was a witness of several jests in which he indulged at the expense of those who forced themselves upon him.

For instance, when a pedantic musician, from a very small Swiss town, obsequiously assured him that he knew all that he (Brahms) had ever written, the latter motioned him to be silent and listen, as the band was just then playing something of his. I still seem to see that good man before me, as he stood there gaping and listening with upturned eyes to the rather common music (it was a military march by Gungl) which he really took for a composition of Brahms; whilst Brahms himself, in great glee at the success of his ruse, whispered to us, 'Well fooled!'

Another musician having introduced himself to Brahms, and being then unable to think of anything clever to say, asked him whether he did not wear spectacles when conducting, on account of his short sight. Brahms, whose piercing blue eyes did not in the least betray his exceeding near-sightedness, did not relish any allusion to this, his only personal defect. On the contrary, he even tried to find an advantage in it, and used frequently to boast how many unpleasant things he escaped seeing when he walked the streets without his eyeglasses; or he would jokingly remark that for such as he there were many more beautiful women than for those whose keener vision destroyed many an illusion. But to that interrogator his reply



was—alluding to Schumann's 'Faust,' which had been performed at this festival—'Yes, my good fellow. Of course I put my glasses on when I see written in the score "here women pass by."'

What the bystanders most enjoyed at these little scenes, was the lightning rapidity of these repartees, which set the whole company a-laughing.

Another day we were sitting over our coffee, and speaking of dreams. Spitteler, the poet, began to tell us about a certain dream that recurred to him at intervals, and was so startling that it almost made his heart stop beating. 'At the further end of a palatial apartment, a door slowly opens. In suspense, my eyes riveted on the door, I await what is to come. And yet what reveals itself to me far surpasses my worst forebodings. In the doorway appears a female figure, no bigger than my forefinger. I gasp for breath . . . ' 'Because she is too small!' interrupted Brahms. Everyone laughed, no one more heartily than the poet and dreamer.

A couple of weeks after the festival, Brahms came with Hegar to Berne, and stayed two days with us there. He was then in particularly good spirits, and played unasked Bach's preludes and fugues, and some of his own pieces—not on

Beethoven's piano, which was then *hors de combat*, but on a more modern instrument.

One evening, lifting my little five-year-old daughter (a very lively child) on to his back, he trotted her merrily all through the town, not in the least disturbed in his pastime by the wondering looks of the passers-by.

Brahms was, as is well known, a great lover of children. After dining at an hotel or restaurant he seldom left the table without filling his pockets with sweets, with which to conjure up a look of pleasure on the face of some poor little child. Being a keen observer, he was often pained by noticing some insincerity or similar fault in grown-up people. But with children—who betray naturally all their naïve egotisms, and whom he nowise looked on as angels, but was satisfied with them as they are—he could refresh his intensely sincere and truth-loving mind after many a disappointment caused him by his fellow-men.

He felt a special sympathy for the children of the poor; and he always regretted that the Swiss children, accustomed to their Alemannic dialects, could not properly understand his North-German speech, and therefore did not chatter with him as freely as he would have liked. He also found the Austrian children livelier and more spontaneous; this, however, did not deter

him, when in Switzerland, from stopping everywhere in the streets to speak to the little folk. When, more than ten years later, he spent several summers in Thun, all the small boys and girls knew him, and used often to follow him about in crowds, shy, yet eager to attract his notice.

## CHAPTER II

### AN OPERA?

THE first performance of Goetz's opera, 'The Taming of the Shrew,' for which I had written the libretto, took place at Mannheim on the 11th of October in the same year that Brahms paid me his first visit in Berne. As is well known, this work gradually went the round of all the opera-houses of Germany and Austria; and even now, after more than twenty years, it still occasionally figures in their repertoires. But the first performance (in 1877) of 'Francesca of Rimini' (the posthumous opera left unfinished by Goetz and completed by Ernest Frank) did not meet with the same success, notwithstanding that it contains some musical gems, for the sake of which Mottl tried to revive it at Carlsruhe some years ago. The composer, who wrote his own libretto, had considered it advisable to insert a cheerful element in the terribly tragic story, and had also allowed himself a

dangerous alteration in Dante's version by making a mere misunderstanding — a hasty action of her husband's — the cause of Francesca's death.

As has already been remarked, Brahms had journeyed to Mannheim for the first performance of this opera. Among other musicians present were Max Bruch, Franz Friedrich von Holstein, and Ernest Frank, who, in the name of the composer's widow (also present), thanked the audience for the sympathetic and respectful reception they had accorded to a work performed under such sad circumstances.

Brahms did not deceive himself as to the meaning of this *succès d'estime*, but refrained from giving an opinion. In the evening, when we were alone together (we were staying at the same hôtel), he explained, in detail, his views on operas and librettos in general, allowing me to perceive that, although he had really forsworn all opera writing, yet he could still be tempted thereto if someone were to offer him a libretto to his taste.

Some few weeks after Brahms's death, there appeared, in the Feuilleton of the *Strassburger Post*,<sup>1</sup> an imaginary interview with Brahms, in which the author endeavours to demonstrate

<sup>1</sup> 'Why Brahms wrote no Opera,' by Alfred Kühn. *Strassburger Post*, No. 296.—13th April 1897.

from internal evidence—that is, from the character of Brahms's music—that Brahms could never have seriously thought of writing an opera.<sup>1</sup> The course of events would seem to verify this assertion, as Brahms never gave an opera to the world. However, not alone do the letters which Brahms wrote to me (given later on) testify that for years he entertained the idea of writing an opera, but I must also draw attention to the fact that, at least in one particular, this branch of his art would have afforded a suitable medium of expression for his artistic temperament. For the strongly emotional side of his character, striving for dramatic expression, must often have made him glance with longing at the stage, where it is more possible to give vent to all passionate feelings than in any other branch of music.

It is well known that Brahms was an inde-

<sup>1</sup> Among others, the following words are put into Brahms's mouth, words which the author (by no means desirous of deceiving the public) later on confesses that Brahms never said:—'My first compositions at once demonstrated my foremost principle, from which I have never swerved, namely, musical independence, without being in the least led away from the purely musical conception by elementary trifles, as so often occurs when words and music are combined. In the long run, a union of music and poetry cannot exist without concessions being made on both sides. And even if a "*Lohengrin*" or a "*Tannhäuser*" reduce these concessions to a minimum, still music without any concessions is for me, as for all musicians, the loftiest ideal. . . . As long as an artist is filled with the fire of true musical genius, he will never subordinate his ideal of his art to any extraneous limitations,' etc.

fatigable theatre-goer, and that dramatic pathos could powerfully affect him. And the fact that (especially in the two last decades of his life) he, on the whole, avoided operatic performances, affords no real reason for questioning the keen interest he took in the opera: on the contrary, does not this rather point to the fear of rekindling long-buried hopes? At any rate, he was always particularly eager when speaking of subjects relating to the theatre; as, for instance, when pointing out to me the total absence of any true dramatic spirit in the first act of the libretto of 'Fidelio,' which is generally considered particularly good, but which he maintained to be actually melodramatic in character. Possessed of extraordinary dramatic instinct, it gave him keen pleasure to analyse any scheme for a dramatic work.

It became clear to me, from those conversations at Mannheim, that what principally withheld Brahms from writing an opera was the difficulty of finding a libretto to his taste. It seemed to him that to compose music for the whole drama was unnecessary, even harmful and inartistic; only the climax, and those parts of the action where words alone cannot suffice, should be set to music. By these means, on the one hand, the librettist gains more space and freedom for the dramatic development of his subject, and, on the

other, the composer is enabled to devote himself exclusively to the demands of his art, which can best be fulfilled when he has musically complete mastery of the situation (as, for example, in an *ensemble* portraying a joyful climax). Besides, he held it to be great presumption to expect music to accompany a purely dramatic dialogue all through several acts.

The foregoing remarks prove conclusively that the views held by Brahms as to the relation between words and music in the opera were diametrically opposed to those illustrated by the Wagnerian opera, and which seem to be accepted by the general public of the day.

As regards the material which might have tempted him, he advised me to look at Gozzi's dramatic fables and farces, more especially 'König Hirsch' and 'Der Rabe.' 'Das laute Geheimniss' likewise interested him, but only in Gozzi's theatrical and cheerful version, not in Calderon's stiff original.

On my return to Berne I had no difficulty in discovering a German translation of Gozzi's plays, as it was at Berne that, just a hundred years ago, one had been published. I found the tragi-comical fairy play 'König Hirsch' in the first volume, and read this curious account of the Magician Durandarte's grimacing statue, and the transformation of King Deramo into a stag,



several times. But after careful consideration, I was seized with discouragement and doubt, not only as to whether I should ever succeed in making a rational and poetical libretto from such a grotesque and extravagant farce, but also whether such a piece, however well carried out, could ever interest a modern audience. It is true the frequent transformations which certain personages undergo formed an attractive motive; but this theme, though both playful and serious, seemed to be overloaded with all sorts of childish trivialities; and I sometimes found myself thinking that even if Brahms, as could not be doubted, were to write the most beautiful music to it, still the whole opera would be considered a kind of second 'Zauberflöte,' and therefore a retrograde movement in the development of the opera.

At the same time the temptation to be able to offer a congenial libretto to such a master of his art as Brahms was too great for one to resist. So I wrote to Brahms that I was ready to make an attempt on Gozzi's fables, and received in the November of the same year the following reply, which confirms the fact that in 1877 Brahms was not yet immovable in his determination to write no opera:—

'I am waiting in vain for a quiet moment in

which to think over your suggestions. In the meantime I must at least send you my heartiest thanks. It was just the Bernese translation of Gozzi that I meant when, at Mannheim, I praised "König Hirsch" and "Der Rabe" to you (the latter is entitled "Faithful John" in Grimm's version). As for me, I have so often vowed never again to think of a libretto—that I should be easily tempted thereto! But yet my inertia in the matter has certainly increased, though I cannot say whether it has done so in other respects! So it would really be wiser for you not to think of me at all.

'Still it would be nice if the subject interested you, and you gave it some further thought. I should like to mention "Das laute Geheimniss" as a third (second) piece; but you ought to have seen it on the stage, in order to realise how even the first scene can raise one above this nether world.

'My copy of "König Hirsch" ends at p. 472, but I suppose that only very little is missing. I should imagine the transformation into a stag (?) and the final scene would be difficult; but everything else is all right, above all, the comic, with its continual undercurrent of seriousness.

'But in either piece ("Hirsch" or "Geheimniss") I should at first chiefly think of the

Dialogue and Secco-Recitative — or rather at present it would seem a matter of indifference to me how the action is developed, except in emotional climaxes.

‘At all events, let us both think the matter over until the spring, when I shall be free to choose where to spend the summer. If you can spare the time, let me know what ideas you have.

‘With kindest regards to you and your wife,  
yours most sincerely, J. BRAHMS.’

On receipt of such a letter I might have been expected to set to work with renewed ardour; but being, at that time, in a responsible position (director of the city girls’ school and training college), I had so little time at my disposal that, as a preliminary, I contented myself with sending an outline of the libretto to Vienna, and awaiting further news from Brahms. But at that time he was engrossed by other things (his second symphony appeared in November 1878); and so it was only in November 1878 that I received a post-card from him, saying:—

‘Oh, “König Hirsch!” He is still lying on my table! I do not deserve it, but have you occasionally given it a thought? Heartiest greetings and don’t be angry with your

‘J. BRAHMS.’

There was no cause to be angry, but also none to continue my attempts to make a libretto, in which I lacked all confidence. So I let the matter rest.

Three years later, in August 1881, on a journey to Vienna, I paid Brahms a visit at his idyllic summer residence at Pressbaum, near Vienna. As I walked through the little garden, I caught sight of the great musician reading at an open window; and I felt instinctively that he had now reached a period of his life when there could no longer be any question of his entering a new sphere of work. It may sound strange when I own that the sight of his fine flowing beard (which I then saw for the first time, hardly recognising its owner) seemed to me a symbol of the perfect maturity of his powers, and of the knowledge of himself and of his aims, to which the great composer had attained; but as such was my impression both at that time and after, I cannot here conceal it.

The unexpected sight of this Jupiter-head astonished me so much that I burst out with a question as to the reason of this metamorphosis. 'A clean-shaven man is taken for an actor or a priest,' answered Brahms, stroking his mighty beard complacently. He had now a certain naïve pleasure in his personal appearance, and smilingly informed me that his photograph with

the beard had been used in a school-book as an illustration of the Caucasian type. (Baenitz, 'Class-book of Geography.' First Course.)

During the days I spent in Vienna, Brahms was so extremely friendly as to desert his quiet Pressbaum for my sake, and we used to dine together at his favourite restaurant, 'Zum rothen Igel.' He was particularly interested in my account of a visit I had paid to the Cistercian Monastery, Heiligenkreuz, to which my father had once belonged, and where I had now been kindly received by a brother who was so unprejudiced as to ignore the fact that, for the members of this order, I had really no right to existence.

One evening we went together to the Burgtheater, then yet in its old quarters, where Goethe's 'Geschwister' and 'Clavigo' were given; Fräulein Wessely, a charming young actress, who died a couple of years later, taking the chief female rôles. Brahms, who sat next to me, was moved to tears by the nobility of sentiment in the former play, although its theme is not really a sad one. So tender, so sensitive to the influence of all that was beautiful in Art and Poetry was this large and strong-souled man, who just for this reason felt the need of disguising his true self by a semblance of roughness.

The opera was not mentioned by either of us in those days at Vienna. But several years

later, the fact that Brahms spent three successive summers near Berne, caused several newspapers to make the assertion that he was composing an opera for which I had furnished the libretto ; and this made me revert, in a letter, to our old plan, with the remark that it was a pity that the rumour should remain groundless. Brahms replied under date January 7th, 1888.

‘ Have I never told you of my good resolutions, father of my Johanna ?<sup>1</sup> Amongst these, to try neither an opera again nor marriage. Otherwise I think I should immediately undertake two (that is, operas), “ König Hirsch ” and “ Das laute Geheimniss.” Of the latter, I have even a libretto ready, made years ago by that same engraver in copper, Allgeier, who has now written those good essays on Feuerbach. Now, if you, dear friend, have downright liberal views and principles, you will easily see how much money I save and can spare for a journey in Italy — if, in the summer, I neither marry nor buy a libretto ! Instead of that, could we not travel together ? I cannot get on well alone in Italy, and for a companion,’ etc.

With the exception of a couple of humorous postcards, and an occasional sentence in a letter,

<sup>1</sup> Brahms used to call my little daughter his bride, and therefore sometimes addressed me as ‘ father of my Johanna.’

this was the last allusion to the opera project. But it is a significant fact that Brahms, with that faithfulness that was peculiarly his, still thought with regret of the oft-mentioned plays of Gozzi and Calderon. They must have been very cherished schemes of his; and thus the assertion that Brahms had never contemplated writing an opera can no longer be maintained.

‘To try neither an opera again—nor marriage’ are the good resolutions mentioned by Brahms in the humorous letter just quoted. I may therefore here relate what Brahms once said to me on the second point, namely, as to why he had remained single.

He usually only spoke jokingly of his bachelor state, and especially when answering inquiries of inquisitive ladies would make use of the facetious formula: ‘It is my misfortune still to be unmarried, thank God!’ Such jokes and other little malicious remarks, as also the club life which his bachelor state constrained him to lead, often reminded me of Lessing; which comparison was strengthened when Brahms—one single time—spoke to me earnestly and with deep feeling of this matter, thereby reminding me of the touching words of Lessing, who ‘would also have liked to have been happy as others are’ (from a well-known letter of Lessing’s after the early death of his wife).

It was in one of those summers in Thun, of which fuller details are given in the next chapter. Early one morning we were walking along the road which leads by the lake from Beatenbucht to Merligen, and had somehow come to speak of women and family life. Brahms said: 'I have missed my chance. At the time I wished for it, I could not offer a wife what I should have felt was right.' Upon my asking him, if by that he meant that he had lacked confidence in his power to keep wife and children by his art, he replied: 'No, I did not mean that. But at the time when I should have liked to marry, my music was either hissed in the concert-rooms, or at least received with icy coldness. Now for myself, I could bear that quite well, because I knew its worth, and that some day the tables would be turned. And when, after such failures, I entered my lonely room I was not unhappy. On the contrary! But if, in such moments, I had had to meet the anxious, questioning eyes of a wife with the words "another failure"—I could not have borne that! For a woman may love an artist, whose wife she is, ever so much, and even do what is called believe in her husband—still she cannot have the perfect certainty of victory which is in his heart. And if she had wanted to comfort me . . . a wife to pity her husband for his non-success . . . ugh! I



cannot hear to think what a hell that would have been, at least to me.'

Brahms uttered these words vehemently, in short, broken sentences, looking so defiant and indignant that I could think of no reply; and only silently reflected on the one hand, what fiery and tender, jubilant and sad love-songs the man had written, who, walking beside me, thought, at this moment, with bitterness of his lonely condition; and on the other, what mental suffering the noblest and proudest minds have to bear through the hard-heartedness and lack of comprehension of the world. 'It has been for the best,' added Brahms, suddenly, and the next minute showed his usual expression of quiet content.

## CHAPTER III

### THREE SUMMERS IN THUN

My relation to the beloved and honoured Viennese musician had, now that the opera project was happily buried, reached a stage when neither of us looked for anything from the other but the growth of a hearty friendship. And though we occasionally stood at the grave of this said project with feelings of platonic regret, yet the matter was done with and finished. I was also careful not to force any of my verses on his notice, in the expectation that he would set them to music. Only once I showed him a mythological jest, which I thought might do for a cantata for chorus and orchestra, and in which the female soloist, in accordance with the contents of the poem, has to change, so to say, *coram publico* into a being of the masculine gender, which would have to be represented by a sudden change into a low register. Brahms thought it an amusing idea, but very difficult to carry out, and

not sufficiently serious for his muse. With this exception my relation to Brahms remained disinterested, and therefore all the more unconstrained.

In order to spend the summer near me, in May 1886 he took up his residence in Thun for the first time. So as to be undisturbed, he rented the whole of the first floor of a house, the position of which he particularly liked, it being on the Aar. Slanting opposite to this brown house with green shutters is that little island-promontory of Scherzlingen, upon which the poet Heinrich von Kleist dwelt in 1802. As he was particularly comfortable in it, Brahms retained this house during the two following summers.

He would rise at dawn and make himself a cup of coffee in his Viennese machine, for which a faithful admirer, Madame F. of Marseilles, had sent him excellent Mocha coffee in such quantities that he had immediately given some of it to my household, in order that, when staying with us at Berne, he might have the pleasure of playing host and visitor in one, at least at the breakfast table. The morning hours were devoted to work, for which he always seemed to be in the right vein in this Thun residence, where a large verandah and a suite of spacious rooms offered him an undisturbed walk for meditation. The

Sonata for Violoncello and Piano, Opus 99, the Sonata for Violin and Piano, Opus 100, and the Trio for Piano, Violin and Violoncello, Opus 101, are the principal witnesses of his creative activity during that first summer at Thun; all works distinguished by wonderful freshness of imagination; all were first performed at my house.

Whenever the weather permitted, Brahms used to dine in the garden of some restaurant; he always disliked a *table d'hôte* meal, and if possible avoided it, if only for the simple reason that he detested conventional dress. He was most at his ease in a striped flannel shirt, without either tie or stiff collar; even his soft felt hat was more often carried in his hand than on his head. And when, every Saturday, he came over to Berne to take up his quarters with us, remaining generally till the Tuesday or Wednesday, he would appear with a leathern satchel hanging over his shoulder, which looked as if it belonged to a wandering geologist and were full of stones, whereas in reality it principally contained books I had lent him on his last visit, which he brought back in order to exchange for others. In bad weather a brownish-grey shawl, thrown round the shoulders and fastened on the chest with a huge pin, completed the curious, unfashionable attire at which people gazed in astonishment, and which sometimes

reminded me of a certain illustration in an old edition of Chamisso's *Peter Schlemihl*.

These visits were days of great delight and interest to me and my family, on which we now look back with grateful emotion. It is true they were not days of rest. For the active mind of our guest required a responsive mood in those about him, and everyone was stimulated in the endeavour to keep up to the level of his untiring mental activity. But there was ample reward in the enjoyment of intercourse with such a truly great man, who could yet feel himself so happy in this simple family circle.

Brahms was always in excellent spirits. Tolstoi in *Anna Karenina* once speaks of that 'quiet, constant light to be seen on the faces of those who are successful, and are convinced that all acknowledge their success'; and this 'quiet, constant light' truly shone in the countenance of Brahms, but was with him not only the reflection of the consciousness of his fame and success, but still more of the happiness that his creative work gave him, and also of the mental cheerfulness which a thoroughly matured, faithful and honest mind must gain from constant intelligent contemplation of all things in this world.

I have never seen anyone evince such fresh and constant interest in the phenomena of life,

whether of nature, art or even technical industry, as Brahms. Every trifling invention, every improvement in any household utensil, in short, every trace of human thought, if only of practical use, gave him true pleasure. And nothing escaped his observation; no advertisement on a tram-ticket, no well-made toy, nor any other insignificant object, if only there were something new, some progress to be discovered.

But he would vehemently denounce any unpractical arrangement, as for example that in Swiss railway stations the porters are not allowed to carry travellers' luggage into the carriages of the trains. He also detested one modern invention—the bicycle—because it would so often silently whiz pass the unsuspecting pedestrian, or disturb his train of thought with a sudden noisy signal; moreover, to him the movement seemed ungraceful. He always deceived himself with the hope that it was simply a question of a passing fashion. Otherwise he considered himself fortunate in living in the age of great inventions, and could not sufficiently praise such modern wonders as the electric light, Edison's phonograph, etc. He also took a great interest in nature, and all that concerned the animal world; and often, when standing before the bear-pit at Berne, he would question me as to the family customs of the bears.

Altogether, during his visits the themes of conversation seemed inexhaustible. The many books Brahms took from my library or editorial table alone supplied a great variety of subjects. On the whole he was no friend of novelties, preferring to read favourite books two or three times; as he did that summer with the works of Hermann Kurz, only regretting that in the *Sonnenwirth* and Schiller's *Heimathjahre*, the description of the misery of the poor patient Württembergers in the last century affected him so painfully that he could not bring himself to finish reading these books. He would sooner plunge into scientific works on the German language. He borrowed from me several volumes of Grimm's big dictionary, a book he always had at hand in Vienna, also *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, some of Herder's writings, Grillparzer's plays as well as Gottfried Keller's novels and poems, which he had almost constantly by him in Thun, and among new books, chiefly interesting descriptions of travel, voyages of discovery, Stanley's *Africa*, etc.

My collection of Italian photographs was also a source of enjoyment; and we could spend hours over them, each relating his experiences and impressions of Italy, and thus the wish to wander together through Italy was awakened, which desire was realised in the years 1888, 1890 and 1893.

Current events, such as at Whitsuntide 1886 the tragic death of King Louis of Bavaria in the Starnberger Lake, yielded more material for discussion, as Brahms was an attentive newspaper reader and observer of all important events in politics, his chief thought being always whether the event in question would turn out a benefit or a misfortune for Germany and the German people. One can hardly fathom the depths of ardent patriotism that filled his breast. Standing as he did alone, without family ties or cares, that which stirred Brahms most deeply, and could bring a look of intense anxiety to his usually serene countenance, was hearing of political occurrences which he feared would hinder the development of his beloved Fatherland.

I shall later, when referring to the summer of 1888, have to relate how a controversy on this subject nearly cost me his friendship. Surely, when Germany realises how Brahms loved his country, and how he looked upon it as his greatest happiness that his lot had fallen in the time of the resurrection of the German Empire—then the monument which we hope ere long to see raised to the memory of the composer of the ‘Triumphlied’ and ‘German Requiem’ in the capital of that Empire, will commemorate not alone the great musician, but also the ardent patriot!



In this autumn, Ernst von Wildenbruch, who was travelling with his wife in Switzerland, paid us a visit in Berne. I happened to be on a little tour with Brahms, when a telegram from my wife, announcing the arrival of the visitors from Berlin, reached us at Mürren. We returned to Berne the same evening, and chatted together at the fireside, until the night was far advanced, and then spent the whole of the next day with them.

Wildenbruch's plays were held in great esteem by Brahms, who now, on making his acquaintance, found the author's freshness and vigour congenial to him; the wonderful physical strength, so rare in these days of decadent genius, which they both enjoyed in common, also gave them a sense of fellowship. It was a pleasure to find these two men so at one in their political opinions, and to note how the one seemed to spur the other on to flights of loftiest enthusiasm.

Wildenbruch's unbounded veneration for the great poets of the past was likewise a trait quite after Brahms's own heart. He listened with sparkling eyes to Wildenbruch's glowing praise of the dramatic beauty of Æschylus's 'Agamemnon,' giving as an example the passage at the beginning of the play, in which is described how the brilliant beacons, shining from hill to hill, announced the return of the king from Troy, and the watchman's speech in reference to this which follows.

Needless to say that, even in Thun, Brahms received many visits from friends and acquaintances from Germany and Austria, as also from conductors, young composers and lady pianists. The last mentioned hoped for a word of praise, which they would have used as a further recommendation, but through long experience Brahms had acquired the art of politely preventing them from sitting down to the piano. Of course there was also at Thun no lack of inquisitive admirers and autograph hunters; some of these latter even setting to work with great cunning. One day he showed me a letter received from Solingen, which ran as follows: 'Your order for ten dozen rapiers, genuine Solingen make, will be despatched in a day or two; we take the liberty of obtaining payment through the post-office.' But the calculation that Brahms would immediately refuse to receive the supposed order, and so furnish the desired autograph, was made without taking his perspicuity into account. He put the note into his pocket and sent no reply. When neither rapiers nor demand for payment arrived, it became clear how rightly he had judged this to be but another expedient to extort an autograph from him. Again, a German lady in Capetown, who, year by year, with great perseverance, wrote to Brahms ordering 'one of his far-famed Viennese pianofortes,' never received an explanation of the

fact that he was not exactly a manufacturer of pianos.

A young portrait painter from Berlin, who came that summer with Mr Simrock, the publisher, to Thun, ardently desiring to paint Brahms, had to learn that when the latter had refused a request, no importunity availed to change his decision. In order to further the artist's project, in which we all took a very natural interest, I invited him to come with Simrock and Brahms to Kandersteg, where I and my family were spending the month of July in a chalet. A very wet morning, which kept us all in the one large room of the house, seemed to be propitious for the execution of the plan. We believed that we had succeeded in disguising the plot from Brahms, as the artist had expressed the desire to paint my youngest daughter; she therefore seated herself in line with Brahms, so that the artist, while busy with his pastels, could look beyond her at the musician. But after a few minutes, perceiving the ruse, Brahms rose, and remarking that he could no longer inflict the smoke of his cigarettes (he was already at his fifth or sixth) upon 'the ladies and tender children,' went out on to a wooden balcony with a view of the Gemmi Pass, whither I followed him. But it was impossible to persuade him to return to the room that morning; so my little daughter was really painted, whilst

the hoped-for portrait of Brahms had to be renounced.

This dislike to sit for his portrait was strengthened by the fact that he had refused his friend Anselm Feuerbach (a painter whom he especially honoured) such a request shortly before his death; and it would have seemed to Brahms a sort of disloyalty to grant to a young artist and a stranger that which, a few years previously, he had refused to the great painter, when at the zenith of his fame. At a later epoch, Brahms gave way so far as to sit for his bust and an etching; though it remained painful for him to see his personal appearance (although he was in secret quite content with it) made the object of long and intentional observation. But amateur photographs, especially those taken without his knowledge, could give him pleasure; and many a one did he in later years send to me from Vienna and Ischl. The best of these we owe to Frau Fellingner in Vienna, whose hospitable house was a true home to the lonely musician in his last years.

Although we saw each other every week, still there was a frequent interchange of letters between Thun and Berne; not that Brahms, with the exception of some letters given later, was in the habit of going into details. It is true he felt the need of communicating frequently with his friends,

but he possessed in a high degree the art of saying much, in few words. On the whole, letter-writing was burdensome to him, and his favourite sheet of paper, the post-card, 'the size of which beneficently prevented any possible expansiveness' (as Hanslick so politely puts it in the *Feuilleton* of the *Neue Freie Presse* of June 27th, 1897). First among his communications are the amusing cards on which he would announce his intended visit, for example :—

'I will not ; I ought not ; I may not ; I cannot—but I must ! I must go and see if the little one<sup>1</sup> has not come back. Much as you write, never is there mention of this gem of the house, of the street, of the town,' etc.

Or again :—

'Just decided to look you up to-morrow, Thursday, afternoon. If there is no cake on the table, it will be taken as a sign of dismissal by your  
B.'

Another time, when I had opened a public subscription on behalf of an old actor, I received the following post-card :—

'*Enclosed* twenty francs—or will you mean-

<sup>1</sup> My little daughter, who was away on a holiday.

while accept it after this fashion and cash will follow ; if necessary, enforce payment by pawning the travelling effects<sup>1</sup> of the well-known climber of the Jungfrau and Niesen and frequenter of the Schänzli theatre.'

Brahms was very partial to the summer theatre on the Schänzli, where operas and operettas were frequently given, mostly with pianoforte accompaniment. Above all, he would never miss a performance of the 'Fledermaus,' which was given several times that summer ; but he would often exclaim : ' Could you but see and hear this played and sung in Vienna ! '

As regards the signature as mountaineer, the allusion to an ascent of the Jungfrau was only a joke ; but Brahms had really ascended the Niesen with us, and had also walked from Kandersteg to the beautiful Oeschinensee at the foot of the Blümlisalp. It is true that with his inclination to corpulency, climbing was no easy matter, and during an ascent he would often accuse himself of folly in attempting such trips. Likewise the steep path to Mürren—there was then no mountain railway—involved some hard work. But his downhill pace was a merry one, and he usually went so quickly that it was hardly possible to keep up with him.

<sup>1</sup> These usually consisted of brush, comb and tooth-brush.

But our correspondence was not limited to humorous notes ; sometimes we exchanged views on more serious questions. Once I had in a letter expressed the opinion that a stand ought to be made against the undue preponderance of male choruses and brass bands, whereupon Brahms wrote :—

‘Your zeal against male choruses and brass bands reminds me of the temperance societies which occasionally ask me for sympathy. . .

‘But I have none. It is so easy to deprive the poor man of his oft sorely-needed dram. I should be much in their favour if such societies had the object and the power of procuring compensation for him by making wine, beer and coffee cheaper.

‘Now male choruses and the modern brass instruments are convenient for the common man ; everything else has to be approached more cautiously and learnt earlier. Unfortunately, amongst the so-called better classes, a fondness for any other instrument but the piano seems to be almost non-existent.

‘It is very desirable that parents should let their children learn other instruments—violin, violoncello, flute, clarionet, horn, etc. (This would also be the means of arousing interest in all sorts of music.)

‘But there could be more and better work done for singing in the schools, as also by letting boys commence the violin very early—I have often seen that done in Austrian villages. The singing of the Mass in Catholic churches is also far from stupid! To sing at sight in all keys, and to be on intimate terms with fugues!’

The next day Brahms sent the following lines after this dissertation :—

‘DEAR FRIEND,—Let the punishment follow the crime. Therefore,<sup>1</sup> I have induced the “songstress” (Fräulein Spiess, Hermione without the “o”), to break in on you a week hence, on her return from the Lake of Geneva, and with my help to torture you with songs.

‘You can either have the doors locked, or invite Professor V. and Professor St. to share the agony.

‘For the rest, you are too kind!’<sup>2</sup> But I have placed an Italian novel on the top of the Nietzsche, whilst I think twice whether I will walk under a blue or a grey sky! . . .

‘If not before, I shall probably come on Wednesday with spears and bars (Spiessen und Stangen)!—Heartiest greetings,’ etc.

<sup>1</sup> This ‘therefore’ means ‘no male choruses but.’

<sup>2</sup> I had sent some new books to Thun.



In the charming Memoirs,<sup>1</sup> written by the sister of the singer, there is, on p. 166, a description of the 'musically never-to-be-forgotten day' which followed this letter. 'Brahms had come over from Thun to his friends the W.'s, and had invited a number of the most musical people in Berne to listen to the music. The most beautiful songs vied with one another; and between them Brahms played Bach in his incomparable manner. Memorable hours—' etc. The visit was repeated in June 1888, and was the occasion of another delightful musical feast, at which Hermine Spiess sang, besides many songs of Brahms', the whole of Schumann's 'Dichterliebe,' Brahms accompanying her. (Details in the *Gedenkbuch*, pp. 229 and 230.)

Autumnal storms were already blowing, when Brahms left Thun at the beginning of October, and returned to Vienna. He left his whole provision of coffee and his coffee-machine in my wife's care, as he fully intended to return the following summer; although as he often said, both in letters and verbally, he did not care for the frequently rather disobliging manner of that part of the Swiss nation with which the foreigner comes into contact when travelling. In his first letter to me, written shortly after his arrival

<sup>1</sup> 'Hermine Spiess. Ein Gedenkbuch für ihre Freunde, von ihrer Schwester.'—Stuttgart. G. J. Göschen.

in Vienna, he says : ' Now I will give you details of the journey<sup>1</sup> and of Vienna ; and tell you how much pleasure it gives me to see the first Austrian guards and waiters again.'

Among the friendly messages contained in this letter there was also one to our servant 'Vreneli'; for with Brahms politeness and even kindness did not cease at a certain rank or class, but only where, irrespective of either, he thought he saw some insincerity, for example, unwarranted arrogance, affectation, or love of finery. It could sometimes happen that with half intentional, half unintentional rudeness he would turn his back on some 'grande dame,' who was displaying all her art to attract the attention of the celebrated man, and turn to the waiting - maid, in whose honest eyes he read natural simplicity, and address some friendly word to her ; for instance, how much he had enjoyed a certain dish, or something similar.

Brahms arrived in Berne in May of the following year, whilst I was still travelling in Italy. He also came from Italy, having been to Rome with Mr Simrock and Theodor Kirchner—we had meant to meet in Bologna, but had missed each other. On arriving in Berne, Brahms met my wife with the words :

<sup>1</sup> Which of course was not the case.

‘Your husband has gone on to Cyprus, and I have come to act the *paterfamilias*.’

A couple of days later I returned from Venice, and then the constant intercourse between Berne and Thun was renewed, with the difference that Brahms came to us even oftener and for longer than formerly, as Thun offered few attractions to him that cold and rainy summer. At one time my family stayed in a little house above Merligen on the Lake of Thun, whilst I remained in Berne, only spending each Sunday with them.

Brahms treated the theme of the wet and cold weather with constant variations in amusing post-cards:—

‘I imagine you will take a photographer with you to Merligen to-morrow, in order to have groups taken of the frozen people. The sensation will doubtless be great, but I will perhaps look on. Afterwards, we will search for newly-formed ice-grottoes, and finally—for the remains of the provisions!—Heartiest greeting and sympathy, your  
J. B.’

Again:—

‘DEAREST FRIEND!—I will just tell you briefly that this week you do not need to look for any Iceland moss for me, nor prepare any sealskin;

I shall not travel before the beginning of next week,' etc.

Another time he wrote :—

‘It would not be difficult by a stretch of imagination to change a cold and miserable Whitsuntide into a bright and merry Christmas. And as a little musical festival will also take place, do not feed the musicians too copiously, so that they can have a good practice, and afterwards, as a reward, go to the Schänzli Theatre!’

The little ‘musical festival’ consisted in a ‘home-concert,’ in which the brothers Hegar from Zürich (violin and ‘cello) assisted Brahms in playing several of his new compositions from manuscript. Another card was in biblical style :—

‘And they brought unto them meat from his table. But unto B. (rahms) was given five times as much as unto the others. And they drank and were drunken with him. Thus it has been and will be in the palace of Joseph ;<sup>1</sup> wherefore the heart of B. rejoiceth.’

These notes will suffice to show what a merry visitor Brahms was. If there is anything agreeable to a hostess, it is to see her guests

<sup>1</sup> His host's Christian name.—*Trans. Note.*

bring a healthy appetite, and appreciation of what is put before them, to table; and surely this was never more the case than with Brahms, although he was accustomed to the exquisiteness of the Viennese *cuisine*. He did not expect delicacies, and knew how to do justice to simple fare, lessening by many little attentions the daily burden of his hostess. In this respect he had an incomparable delicacy of feeling, and understanding of the needs and occasional embarrassments of a modest household, which often called forth the admiration of my womenkind.

However, the summer of 1887 did not consist of rainy days only. On a glorious day in June we revisited the beautiful plateau of Mürren; for Brahms had a similar feeling with regard to his favourite places as with good books, preferring to revive former memories rather than to seek after fresh impressions. As we descended towards Gimmelwald, I was so impressed by the majesty of the snow-clad giants opposite us that I gave utterance to the thought of how impossible it is to keep this glory in one's mind, so as to reproduce it through the medium of poetry or art. Brahms stood still, looked at me with laughing eyes, and exclaimed, 'Well, I must say you are the rudest man I ever came across! Any other, taking such a walk with me, would every now

and then know how to bring in some flattering word, for example, that is just like a passage in your third symphony, or something similar! But one never hears anything like that from you!' And clapping me on the shoulder, he laughed heartily. A little later, as we were resting on a hill near Stechelberg he observed with a roguish look: 'I like us. (Wir gefallen mir). Well, Mr Author, is it not admissible to say that? Perhaps it is new to you. But consider, it is quite correct.' And he merrily repeated, 'I like us!'

The happiness which such a friendship gave me was enhanced by the fact that Brahms introduced me to many of his German and Austrian friends, who visited him in Thun. For instance that summer: the distinguished Professor G. Wendt from Carlsruhe, Max Kalbeck, the lyric poet and musical critic, and his oldest and most intimate friend, Professor Edward Hanslick, from Vienna; and, in the following year, Klaus Groth, who was travelling with C. W. Allers, the artist. The elder of those here named probably never thought that they would all survive the man who was then the merriest in our merry circle, and whom considerations of health never deterred from any undertaking.

This time Brahms left Berne as early as September, with the object of spending some days with Madame Clara Schumann in Baden-Baden.

On the morning of his departure, much to the joy and comfort of his kind heart, he was witness of the happy return of my little dog Argos, whom a few days previously I had been obliged to leave behind me on the Mer de Glace at Grindelwald. The approach of the autumnal night had made it inadvisable to tarry longer on the glacier; so I had been obliged to obey the guide, who would not allow the precious minutes before dark to be wasted in fruitless endeavours to catch the little dog, whose fear at the ice-crevasses prevented him from following us. Brahms, who had not shared this expedition, was very unhappy at seeing me return without the dog. 'You will never see the dear little fellow again!' That was what we all feared; great therefore was our joyful surprise when, before six o'clock on the Monday morning, we heard the sound of scraping against the house-door, and on opening it the little Scotch terrier jumped up at us with a sound more like the exultant cry of a human being than the bark of a dog. From Friday till Monday he had been on the way: he must have run along the whole breadth of the Eiger, over the Scheidegg and Wengernalp to Lauterbrunnen and Interlaken, from there along by the lake to Thun and finally thence to Berne, where he arrived safe and sound, but exhausted. The

rejoicing at the unexpected return of the little favourite was so great that we, old and young, stood round him regardless of our half-finished toilets, Brahms, the early riser, having the advantage over us in this respect. I still seem to see him as he stooped over Argos, and surrendering his face and hands to the wildly joyful caresses of the little dog, exclaimed,—

‘So such things do happen, and are not only sportsmen’s stories!’ And he was delighted at the thought of telling this anecdote to his friends. And in his first letter from Vienna, he writes: ‘How is Argos? Would he take it as a tender greeting from me, if you were to give him a nice piece of meat, instead of dog-biscuit?’ (which wish was of course duly fulfilled).

In the following spring I met Brahms on the 7th May (his birthday) at Verona, and we started on the first of the Italian tours we made together. On our return to Switzerland, Brahms settled down for the third time in his quarters at Thun, and, as formerly, spent the Sundays with us in Berne, or joined us in some excursion to Grindelwald, etc.

That summer was a busy one for me. I had just bought a new house and garden, and it seemed a good omen to us all that Brahms should be our first guest. About the same time I had entered



upon a heated newspaper controversy concerning certain revelations made as to a charitable institution which brought me into conflict with the authorities, and naturally occasioned me some excitement and vexation. This caused a certain irritability, which no doubt left its traces on an article which I wrote whilst temporary substitute for the political editor of the *Bund* upon an expression used by the young German emperor in a speech at Frankfort on the Oder.

Brahms felt hurt by the tone of this article, and this led to political discussions which were unprofitable for both parties, and for a moment threatened to completely rupture our friendly relations. Now, on looking back, I must confess to having overshot the mark, which can easily happen to a *dilettante* on the ticklish path of political journalism.

Still, the occurrence had the one good result of provoking a written expression of Brahms's opinion of Richard Wagner's works, which, by the high appreciation of Wagner's operas therein stated, proves conclusively how mistaken is the idea that Brahms, notwithstanding the antagonism of their theories of Art, had neither understood nor done justice to the enormous significance of Wagner's work.

In a letter of five pages, dated August 20th, 1888, Brahms writes to me :—

‘ Thus all that comes from Germany is severely criticised, though the Germans themselves lead the way. It is the same in Politics as in Art. *If the Bayreuth Theatre stood in France, it would not require anything so great as the works of Wagner to make you and Wendt and all the world go on a pilgrimage thither, and rouse your enthusiasm for something so ideally conceived and executed as those music-dramas.*’

This is a weighty criticism as spoken by one great musician of another’s work. And though the fact remains that Brahms, as the representative of absolute music, worked on quite different lines from those followed by Wagner, still it is now clear that Brahms held the ‘ideally conceived and executed’ work of Wagner as something great, of which Germany should be proud. This coincides with what he once said to me that same summer, as we were taking an early walk in the garden. Calling himself ‘the best of Wagnerites,’ he observed that his comprehension of the Wagnerian scores was probably more profound than that of any contemporary.

As for the political quarrel, it embittered our next meetings, as, leaving aside the original theme of contention, we had embarked on useless discussions on the advantages and disadvantages of the monarchical and republican forms of govern-

ment. In the desire to heal the breach caused by these unfortunate differences, I wrote on this subject to Gottfried Keller (he greatly admired Brahms, and had often sent him greetings through me) and appealed to him to be our arbitrator. Keller's reply, dated August 30th 1888, is not included in the letters given in Baechtold's *Life of Gottfried Keller*, nor can it here be given in full. But some of the pacifying words, which he addressed to me, may find a place here.

‘It is a question of a something that is at the same time a nothing. At anyrate, I recognise the tremendous change which has, in many respects, been brought about by the war and foundation of the German Empire. When at one time I spent many years in Berlin, Prussians and non-Prussians listened to, and even joined in, sharp or ironical criticisms of the different governments and their doings without displaying much warmth. Now, after eighteen short years, the very son of a free town clings more pathetically to emperor and dynasty than probably was ever the case in the days of former greatness. At the same time, I must confess that you did injustice (at least according to my opinion) to the royal speaker at Frankfort in your article. What you wrote was, of course, well meant, but could not be acceptable to one on the other side also feeling warmly in

the matter. But I think that the regrettable tension between you and B. will subside, especially if you do not dogmatically insist upon your views, which can in this case not amount to principles.'

When this well-meaning exhortation to peace reached me, our political warfare was just at an end, and so it seemed best to me to say nothing to Brahms of Keller's letter, so as not to touch the healing wound. In silent agreement we for some time avoided all political topics, having discovered how heated we could both become. Good-fellowship was again established, and soon one or other of us would venture little hits relating to our dispute, which proved the genuineness of our reconciliation.

And when in September Brahms took his departure (to spend a few weeks with Madame Schumann in Baden-Baden before returning to Vienna), it was not before we had planned another journey to Italy for the next spring, which, however, through unforeseen circumstances, was only carried into execution in May 1890.

## CHAPTER IV

### IN ITALY

THE various journeys which Brahms took to Italy may certainly be accounted the chief of his pleasures, apart from those connected with his Art, for he had a passionate love for that land of beauty, and a spring which brought no journey to Italy seemed to him half wasted, this being especially the case during the last decade of his life.

Probably the chief source of this love for Italy may be found in his consciousness of an inner sympathy with the masters of the Italian Renaissance. Not that Brahms ever compared his creative work with that of those artists whose productions, whether in the province of architecture, sculpture or painting, were his delight! On the contrary, on those rare occasions when he spoke to some friend of his own works it was always with a touching modesty, ever showing the deepest veneration for the great heroes of the

past in every field of Art. But such comparisons unconsciously suggested themselves when witnessing his rapt contemplation of the artistic treasures of Italy, or when listening to his enthusiastic praise of some characteristics of the Old Masters, characteristics which, in very truth, he himself possessed in a high degree; for instance, their conscientiousness of execution in minute details and their faithful industry in Art.

Brahms's especial delight was to discover gems of patient labour, which would pass unnoticed by the ordinary tourist. For instance, in Santa Maria Maggiore at Bergamo, it gave him the greatest pleasure to note the beautiful Intarsia work, which is there applied not only to the backs of the choir stalls, but also to the seats themselves, these latter being usually kept covered with boards, which, however, the sacristan removed on perceiving the delight and insatiable interest with which the bearded stranger, whom he took for a 'scultore,' studied the upper part.

There is no doubt that Brahms felt the Art of the Italian Renaissance akin to his own artistic nature, though, as I have already observed, he was much too modest ever to acknowledge the analogy. And his interest in the art treasures of Italy was perfectly natural and spontaneous, not based upon any previous study of the history of Art. It is true he enjoyed the perusal of

modern classical works on Italy, such as Jacob Burckhardt's *Cultur der Renaissance*, or the writings of Gregorovius, but even this rather in remembrance of a just completed journey than in preparation for the same. Also when visiting churches and museums, he did not often consult the guide-books, preferring to rely on his own perception of what was most worthy of admiration. He would walk at a rapid pace through the galleries. Where he paused one might be sure that there was some true work of Art or something particularly original to be seen. Then he would beckon to his companion, and draw his attention to some delicate touches in the picture; but sometimes he preferred to be alone, as the sight of the most transcendent beauty easily moved him almost to tears. An instance of this was the 'Betrothal of St Catherine,' by Parmigiano, in the gallery at Parma, a picture which, in the graciousness of the many indescribably lovely faces of fair-haired children and girls, is a true symphony of sweetness, unsurpassed even by the masterpieces of Correggio in the same gallery. Deeply impressed, Brahms stood long before this picture. Altogether it did not require the tragically sublime to move him deeply; pure beauty, if ever so simply expressed, could do this.

It certainly cannot be said that, when in Italy, Brahms went in search of music, as was the case

with Mendelssohn or Nicolai in the first decades of this century. The German musician living at Vienna, and having the library of the *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde* at his disposal, in addition his own rich collection of manuscript scores, did not need to go to Italy to seek for old Italian Church music. Besides, with the possible exception of the season of Easter at Rome, one seldom hears any of the beautiful old masses in the Italian cathedrals, but rather insignificant, if melodious, works of modern composers. And, as the experience of many travellers shows, the organists do not even hesitate to play such trivial things as operettas during the service; a fact quite sufficient in itself to scare away a musician like Brahms. There are even, as in Parma, some organs fitted with stops imitating Turkish music with drums and bells.

Operatic performances in Italy had also but little attraction for Brahms; but he entertained great respect for the Maestro Verdi, speaking of him in enthusiastic terms,<sup>1</sup> and dwelling with

<sup>1</sup> In the 86th 'Neujahrsheft der Musikgesellschaft in Zürich' (1898), we read the following anecdote about Brahms and Verdi, which we owe to Dr Friedrich Hegar:—

'Upon once hearing Bülow speak in disparaging terms of Verdi's "Requiem," Brahms went immediately to Hug's music-shop (in Zürich), and obtaining the pianoforte score, read it through. When he had finished it, he said: "Bülow has made a fool of himself for all time; only a genius could have written that."'

The above-mentioned pamphlet, which only deals with Brahms,



pleasure on the fact that in his habits of life, such as early rising, simplicity in clothing, and unostentatious demeanour, Verdi resembled himself. He was greatly interested in my account of a visit I had paid, in the spring of 1887, to the peasant's cottage at Roncole where, in 1813, Verdi was born, and also to the neighbouring town of Busseto where he now possesses a villa. Often did I narrate how Verdi would drive over to Cremona for the horse-fair, in order to exercise his practised eye in the selection of purchases for his stables; or how I had visited the priest, Antonio Chiapperi at Roncole, in order to investigate the truth of the legend, which Arthur Pougin incorrectly relates in his biography of Verdi, and according to which Russian soldiers had, in the year 1814, massacred the inhabitants of the little village, from which Verdi's mother rescued him by carrying the one-year-old baby up to the bells in the Campanile.

Brahms's great predilection for Verdi was chiefly due to the fact that, like himself, Verdi was a true child of the people. But, notwithstanding this personal sympathy, Brahms when in Italy could never be persuaded to go to hear one of Verdi's operas; the mere fact that there these performances commence at a late hour and

and especially with his connection with Zürich, is by A. Steiner, whom Brahms greatly esteemed as a musical critic.

often continue till after midnight, was enough to deter him from doing so, as, even when travelling, he usually rose before five o'clock in the morning.

On the other hand, in addition to the works of plastic Art, it was essentially the character of the Italian people which made Italy so dear to Brahms. As an artist, he delighted in the spontaneity and fervour of a people who, by virtue of their inheritance of centuries of refining culture, even in violent outbreaks of passion, do not become repulsive; on the contrary, in such moments frequently gain a new attraction, which in our cold-blooded North can only be admired in dramatic representations. Brahms, though he could not bear exaggeration of sentiment, was yet averse to the manner of the North German and the Swiss, which is so frequently cold and formal, and chary of any show of real feeling, or, in moments of powerful emotion, easily becomes rough and violent. He was fully aware that he himself was not quite free from this fault, and would openly acknowledge that his manner was occasionally calculated to wound even a friend, and was always ready to apologise if he had cause to fear that in an unguarded moment he had given offence. The more he discovered deficiencies in this respect in our German character in general and in his own

in particular — which deficiencies occupied his mind greatly, causing him much compunction—the more did he delight in living for months among a people who, owing to their native tact and refined instincts, do not require the artificial polish of the higher classes, in order to retain their charm of manner under any circumstances.

In his intercourse with the Italians, Brahms took special pains not to be behindhand with them in the suavity of manner and the exceeding courtesy which distinguishes them. For instance, even in a compartment *pei fumatori*, he would never light his cigarette without having first inquired of any signora, who chanced to be in the carriage, whether she would permit him to smoke. But with him, politeness had its root in truly heartfelt kindness, as instanced by the fact that, upon arriving at an hotel at night, it was his custom, even if he stayed up another hour in his room, immediately to put his boots outside the door, 'so that no poor servant should have his sleeping-time curtailed by having to wait for them!' Meanwhile he, himself, despising such things as slippers, walked about in his socks on the marble or tiled floor, thus displaying an absence of physical sensitiveness of which very few can boast.

As a rule, Brahms was an extremely close and critical observer of everything in life; but

his preference for the Italian character was so great ~~as sometimes to render him blind~~ to its faults. For instance, he refused to see the shady side of life in Italy, the poverty and sad condition of the peasantry; it would have been too painful for him to think of this people as unhappy. From a similar feeling, he would try to persuade himself that cruelty to animals had so decreased in Italy as hardly to be any longer worthy of mention. As regards certain towns in Northern and Central Italy this view is in some degree justified by facts, more especially is this the case in Tuscany, where, among a more refined population, gentler customs prevail; but Brahms wished to extend this assertion even to Southern Italy and Sicily, and could, in his zeal as defender of the Italian people, even go so far as to speak on behalf of the Sicilian's bad habit of taking a gun with him on every walk, and shooting down whatever crosses his path.

He also did not believe in brigandage. When (in 1893), we ascended Monte Pellegrino near Palermo, Brahms was really vexed that, at the foot of the mountain where there is a police-station, one of the *Guardia civile* received an order to accompany us foreigners, so that no unpleasant adventure might occur, and give the town and neighbourhood a bad name. And it

was only after we had met, on the road to the temples at Girgenti, several carriages filled with schoolgirls and their teachers on their way to visit the famous ruins, and had been told that it was by order of the town authorities that they were also accompanied by three policemen, mounted and fully armed, that Brahms unwillingly acknowledged that, as regards public security, things were not quite as they should be in Sicily.

I only mention these incidents as they show how carefully Brahms guarded those ideal illusions, which were necessary to his undisturbed enjoyment of Italy. His only desire was to be happy there, to be perfectly happy; and, like the Olympian gods, he turned his countenance away from all that might damp his pleasure in the present.

Every sign of United Italy's increasing prosperity was welcomed by him with delight. And although when, in May 1893, we drove through the streets of Rome to see the preparations for the reception of the German Emperor, Brahms was quite agreed that we should escape from the festive bustle to some quieter spot, still, as we drove under the numerous triumphal arches in the Via Nazionale, with the flags of both countries waving over our heads, the smile of satisfaction which lighted up his face testified to the pleasure

he derived from the thought of a fraternisation between the Italian and German nations. And during the following days, he read the accounts of the festivities in the Italian papers with the greatest attention, finding in the Emperor's visit something like an historical and harmonious solution of those discords caused in the Middle Ages by the unwelcome and baneful incursions of the German armies into Italy.

It is hardly necessary to add that the beauty of the Italian landscapes had great fascination for Brahms, especially that combination of luxuriant vegetation and imposing architecture which is productive of such lovely effects. He also knew how to appreciate those pleasant things—the good wines, the well-prepared dishes of the true Italian pranzo, the excellent coffee, the large and almost princely beds in spacious apartments—which make life in Italy so agreeable to the traveller who ventures to deviate from the beaten track. Apart from the fact that, accustomed as he was to the exquisite Viennese cookery, he appreciated a good table, he cared but little about luxury, and could on occasion be quite satisfied to spend a night in the poorest hostelry; yet he liked the southern love of brightness, as displayed in the fancifully-painted ceilings of the *alberghi* or the splendour of the table appointments, etc. It seemed to him that where Nature is so lavish

with her gifts, a certain love of show and grandeur is but in keeping. At the same time his mind revolted against any over-indulgence in material pleasures. It is true that, knowing his own restless energy, he sometimes tried to persuade himself to say to the fleeting hour, 'Verweile doch, du bist so schön' ('Oh, linger yet, thou art so beautiful'); and in many a letter, in which he year by year asked me to be his companion on a journey to Italy, did he assure me of his good resolution to loiter this time in some quiet spot, such an one for instance as Amalfi. But he found it difficult to carry out these good intentions. From his youth upwards accustomed to filling every hour with work, his mind was always on the search for fresh outlets of energy, and often, when I proposed a slower *tempo* for our tours, did he jokingly reproach me with indulging in the idea that one could travel for pleasure only, in a country where at every step there was so much that was new to be seen.

The Italians, on their side, returned Brahms's love for them by an instinctively respectful admiration for the silver-bearded German with the noble countenance, even though they knew not who he was. More than once, when Brahms was dozing in a corner of the railway carriage, did our fellow-passengers whisper the conjecture that this stranger must be a 'uomo di genio.'

And as we were leaving the Hotel 'Croce di Malta' at Padua, where during a short stay we had often chatted over dinner with our stately Padrona, what was our surprise when the latter gave a signal to her beautiful young niece, who immediately stepped up to Brahms, and throwing her arms gracefully round his neck, imprinted a kiss in *optima forma* upon the lips of the astounded musician. And though afterwards I also was a recipient of a similar 'gentilezza,' I never doubted that I owed this odd dismissal from an *albergo* to the impression which the personality of my companion had made upon the Signora Caterina Bianchi. And on another occasion, when in Palermo, we four travellers were being shown over San Giovanni degli Eremiti (formerly an Arabian mosque) by a particularly intelligent and obliging guide, who it turned out was one of the thousand of Marsala and had fought under Garibaldi; suddenly he stopped short in the middle of his fluent explanations, and gazing at Brahms, exclaimed with enthusiasm: 'Ah! mi pare di parlare al mio venerabile generale Garibaldi!' With the quick intuition of the Southerner, he had divined that the stranger before him was no ordinary man, and, knowing no better mode of expressing his homage, he compared him with his beloved general, adding afterwards that with



him Garibaldi came immediately after Christ. Brahms received the compliment, which evidently pleased him, with a cheery smile and a bright glance of his deep blue eyes.

Let it be understood that the journeys here referred to are only those on which I had the privilege of being Brahms's companion. We had already visited Italy, independently of each other, Brahms perhaps even oftener than I.<sup>1</sup> But since through the summers in Thun our intimacy had grown, and we had made many a little tour in the Alps together, Brahms wished me to join him in his visits to Italy, our antipathies and predilections in travelling being in unison, this was especially evident in our mutual dislike of large hotels with their crowds of tourists of all nationalities, both of us preferring small and purely Italian hotels.

<sup>1</sup> Even Professor Ed. Hanslick, to whom I applied for information, was unable to tell me how many times and in which years Brahms visited Italy. But he referred me to Billroth's Letters, from which it appears that in the year 1878 Brahms was with Billroth in Rome, Naples and Sicily, that for the years 1879 and 1882 such journeys were planned by Brahms and Billroth and probably also carried out, whilst in a letter, dated Palermo, April 10th, 1880, Billroth regrets that Brahms had not shared that tour with him. Further it is certain that in the spring of 1882 Brahms was in Rome, as he then asked me to meet him on the Palatine. There in 1878 he had met my daughter when on her honeymoon: 'That is the nicest place for a rendezvous!' Finally I am also aware of the fact that in 1887 Brahms travelled in Italy with Theodor Kirchner and Simrock the publisher. We had planned a meeting in Bologna, which, however, did not take place.

Thus it happened that I was Brahms's companion on the three last journeys he undertook in Italy.<sup>1</sup> Soon after New Year he used to inquire per letter whether I thought of going southwards. 'If you should be thinking of even the most modest excursion on the other side of the Alps for the spring, do ask yourself whether you might not be accompanied by your B.' I still possess many of these notes, almost touching in their modesty. Unfortunately I was not always able to reply in the affirmative, as, after a winter of hard work, I frequently felt the need of a quieter holiday than was possible with the friend who, though nine years my senior, was far my superior in untiring vigour. But if I had been able to express my willingness to accompany him—what delight spoke from the letters and post-cards which flew to me from Vienna!—'I expect splendidly *restful* and *restless* weeks! You have only to command when and where I must appear.' Or again: 'you must bring with you something very important for a journey in Italy! Now you will be thinking that I want a Burckhardt or a Gregorovius. Not at all, I only beg you, before passing the frontier, to put two or three little blue packets of French tobacco, (Caporal) in your pockets and bag for me!' Or:

<sup>1</sup> A fuller account of these journeys will be found in *Sizilien und andere Gegenden Italiens* by the same author.

'If you reach Riva before I do, you will of course bespeak a small room for me, and if I arrive by the last train *viâ* Mori, I shall hope to find you sitting happily over a glass of wine. Only let us take it easily; after all it is delightful everywhere in that land of beauty. Padua would be quite agreeable to me, and you certainly should see Orvieto, and I should also like to go to Perugia, and you ought to go to Palermo. Do what you like, I am ready for anything. Wishing us both everything that is good and pleasant,' etc.

The first of our journeys in Italy was in May 1888, when we went through the Marches to Umbria, on to Rome and back through Piedmont. I had joined Brahms at Verona, our first goal being Bologna, where an International Musical Exhibition was being held, to which many interesting manuscripts had been lent by the libraries of all Europe. Although Brahms, for his part, did not anticipate much satisfaction from such an exhibition, still he did not want to pass it by. All the same he felt himself in his real element as we threaded our way between the glass cases in which, along with old masses on illuminated parchments, were exhibited the manuscript scores of Mozart's 'Zauberflöte,' Beethoven's 'Fidelio,' Cimarosa's 'Matrimonio Segreto,' and innumerable manuscripts of works by German and Italian composers up to the

present day. Rare old instruments were also exhibited, amongst these, some horns, trombones and clarionets of most extraordinary forms. However, for a concert, arranged by the committee of the festival in honour of the Queen of Italy, at which these curious instruments (amongst them the true Viol d'Amour) were to be used, Brahms predicted but little success ; and in point of fact, the result was very ridiculous, as the old-fashioned instruments, the handling of which the players found very awkward, sounded so thin, squeaking and chirping to ears accustomed to our modern orchestras, that the Court ladies began to titter, and the whole performance became a farcical comedy.

Brahms detested any affectation in Art, and could be mercilessly ironical on this subject ; none the less could he be roused to enthusiasm over any real capacity, even if displayed under the most wretched conditions. For instance, one night in the Arcades at Bologna we came upon a deaf-mute, who, by the light of a stump of stearine candle, was drawing the life-sized figure of Cavour with black chalk on the flags. When a passer-by paused, he shed the light of his dip over his work. A plate lay beside it, ready to receive the *soldo* with which such street art is sometimes rewarded. But here was a fresh surprise, as the sound of the metal coin on the

hard pavement proved that this was no real plate, but an imitation which, by means of good shading, had been made to appear quite genuine. Brahms was warm in praise of the poor artist's ingenious device, his alms also proving how it touched him that, among this gifted people, even the beggar knows how to cover his nakedness with a lappet of the sumptuous garment of Art.

This time in Bologna, Brahms could not retain his *incognito*, as was his habit when in Italy, being, of course, recognised by German musicians and music critics visiting the exhibition. When the director of the Bolognese Conservatoire and conductor of the Opera, Maestro Martucci (who, although yet quite a young man, had already brought the number of his compositions up to Opus 66), heard of the presence of the great German musician, whom he had so long worshipped from afar, he sent his card to our hotel of the 'Quattro Pellegrini,' requesting permission to pay his respects to Brahms in person. This meeting, at which I was present in order, if necessary, to act as interpreter—for Brahms, though able to read Italian, could not converse in that language—is engraved indelibly upon my memory. Upon entering the room the young maestro prostrated himself nearly to the ground before Brahms, and,

in spite of the German musician's resistance, kissed his hand. With much vivacity of manner, he commenced telling us that he had recently performed Brahms's second symphony in Naples ; and then passing to his chamber compositions, all of which he seemed to know by heart, he began to sing the different themes, pausing only to speak with enthusiasm of discoveries he had made in the scores of certain *finesses* of workmanship not patent to the uninitiated, for instance, the wonderful way in which Brahms treats the middle voices. Very soon my intervention as interpreter became superfluous in this conversation, as Brahms, in his turn, eked out what he wanted to say by singing certain themes; and by these means, the two musicians were enabled to understand each other perfectly.

It was an extraordinary scene, and I silently thought it must be similar to what would have taken place had Bach, in his time, visited the Italians; Albrecht Dürer also came into my mind, as I glanced from the big, serious German musician to the fiery and supple Italian. After Maestro Martucci had taken his departure, Brahms spoke warmly in praise of his intelligent penetration into the essence of German music.

The following day we went on to Rimini, and also visited the little Republic of San Marino,

whence Brahms sent many of the droll San Marino post-cards to his friends at Vienna. What pleasure he took in comparing the old residence of the princes of Malatesta and of San Francesco, the proud home of this race of tyrants, with the poor little 'Postage Stamp Republic'; thus bantering his companion on his republicanism! Altogether on this tour his good humour was invincible. As we passed through Pesaro, he insisted that, even if we did not make a halt, we should at least do honour to the memory of Rossini by each of us singing some air out of the 'Barbiere di Seviglia'; and, as we chanced to be alone in the railway carriage, his proposal was duly carried out.

From Ancona we went a trip to Loreto, the famous place of pilgrimage, where we witnessed a scene by which Brahms was most deeply impressed. A procession had arrived from some world-forsaken villages in the Abruzzi, and the pilgrims were dragging themselves on their knees towards the sanctuary—the wonderful Casa Santa Lauretana—singing hymns, which vibrated in the vault of the huge church. Two young girls, crowned with ivy like young Bacchantes, headed this strange procession; they also were kneeling, though, from their rapt, uplifted gaze, it was evident that they were quite unconscious of the effort they were making. Their wild beauty

increased the sympathy excited by the evident intensity of their feeling. Their luxuriant black tresses thrown back, they kept their fervent glance fixed on the sanctuary. They joined in the singing, their voices trembling with excitement, continually smiting their breasts with clenched hands with such violence that the hollow sound seemed to clash with the tones of the processional hymn. We noticed the streaming eyes of the girl who was nearest to us, though she appeared quite unconscious of her tears. The other pilgrims followed closely in her wake; and the nearer they approached the Casa Santa, the more vehement did their gestures become. The intense excitement of this ecstatic crowd was so genuine that it communicated itself to us. It was so palpable that these poor people would have plucked their hearts from out their bosoms, as an offering at the shrine towards which they were thus painfully struggling on their knees, that we felt our own hearts throb with excitement at this sight and these sounds. Mingled with our emotion, was a deep joy at being witness to such a remarkable demonstration of passionate devotion, which we could hardly believe possible in our day, seeming more to belong to the age of the Crusades. On the other hand we felt deep commiseration for this poor people, who were here



pouring out their innermost soul, whilst the priests, standing on the steps of the Casa Santa, appeared quite indifferent to the kneeling crowd. To my inquiry as to whence these people came, a priest replied, in almost contemptuous tones: 'Sono Abruzzesi! Stupid people! Many more of them come in September, processions of about a thousand heads. This is nothing in comparison.'

It was long before Brahms could find words to express his feelings of sympathy and pity, so great was his emotion. And during the following days, we constantly recurred to this remarkable scene, and to the impression we had received, Brahms never failing to emphasise the thesis which he often put forward: that the power of the Romish Church is much under-estimated by our politicians.

Altogether in Italy the occasions were frequent on which Brahms's liberal Protestant feelings were aroused; but, on the other hand, I must emphasise the fact that he was ever most careful not to wound the religious sensibilities of those around him. For instance, if upon entering a church he saw that the worshippers turned to look at the newcomer, he would never omit to feign to dip his finger in the benitier and lightly make the sign of the Cross, in order not to scandalise

the believers by the intrusion of a heretic, careless of their religious customs. So great was the true courtesy of this man, whom superficial observers considered rough, hard, and even ungracious.

From Ancona we went through the Umbrian Apennines into Roman territory. On the railway journey, which traverses the lovely valley of Clitumnus, Brahms frequently expressed regret that we should run past such interesting old towns as Fabriano, Gubbio and Trevi, the Algiers of Italy; rightly thinking that one ought to have gone through these parts on foot. But some things we did enjoy as pedestrians. Spoleto, for instance, with its wonderful bridge, and Monte Luco, where formerly the Carmelite monks had their hermitages, now turned into villas; and then Terni with the grand waterfall of the Vellino.

In Rome, also, we went about much on foot. I especially recall to mind a long and fatiguing walk we took one morning along the Via Appia, when I suffered much anxiety on account of my companion, as, in accordance with his favourite habit, he was carrying his hat in his hand and, what with the burning sun and the exertion of walking along the dusty road, I noticed his face become alarmingly red. Fortunately we came across a

ruined inn, where we could obtain shelter from the heat, and refresh ourselves with the white wine of the country.

On another excursion to Tivoli and Hadrian's Villa, Brahms had the great satisfaction of witnessing a little scene, which proved that, in and about Rome, the renown of the German scholar Mommsen had penetrated even to the lower classes. This celebrated archæologist happened to be waiting, at the same time with us, for the steam-tram from Tivoli at the little station at Hadrian's Villa. A vendor of coins and pieces of marble came and displayed his wares before the great scholar. Mommsen did not buy anything, but volunteered some information about the age and value of certain coins. The young vendor, profiting by the opportunity, asked the stranger, who seemed to know so much of this subject, about other things, such as the probable whereabouts of certain buried towns; and as he possibly began gradually to suspect with whom he was speaking, he casually dropped the remark that just then there was staying in Rome a German scholar, 'l'illustrissimo Mommsen,' who thoroughly understood all these things. 'Son' io!' said Mommsen, simply, smiling quietly. At this the vendor and the simple folk round him appeared greatly impressed, saying to each other in awestruck

tones, 'That is Mommsen, the great German scholar!' Then turning to me, Brahms exclaimed, 'At what wayside station in Germany would it be possible to witness such a scene? Where would the slightest notice be taken of the presence of the great archæologist, except by the educated classes?' At the same time it evidently gave him pleasure that such things were possible in Italy, and especially that he should have been there to witness this little scene.

Faithfulness—as all his friends know—was a predominant characteristic of Brahms. Thus it was in memory of his friend Anselm Feuerbach that we visited the former *café* of the German artists, the 'Genio,' near the Fontana Trevi, which, however, has now quite fallen out of favour. An excursion to Nettuno and Porto d'Anzio was also undertaken in memory of Feuerbach, as it was on the shores of these places that he had made studies for his 'Medea.' Here Brahms found an opportunity of indulging in one of his greatest pleasures, that of making friends with intelligent and unspoiled children; as, soon after we reached the beach, we were surrounded by a circle of charming little boys, who were delighted to enter into the fun which the 'Signor Prussiano' proposed. Not only did they exhibit for our benefit their

prowess in swimming by diving for the usual coins, but they also showed off their school-learning; thus one of them, to whom Brahms had given paper and pencil, wrote, with a sly hit at the exterior of the merry stranger, the words 'grasso, grigio,' as well as his name Felippo Treglia. This little lad had followed Brahms about like a faithful dog; and, as the train moved out of the station, he looked after us with his large dark eyes, waving a last farewell.

As Brahms intended to spend that summer (1888) at Thun, we also took the return journey together, travelling by way of Turin and Milan over the St Gotthard.

Our second tour, undertaken in the spring of 1890, was limited to Northern Italy. It was on a cold day in April that I met Brahms at Riva on the Lake of Garda, and Brahms was mighty proud of his good idea of wearing three pairs of trousers, one on the top of the other, on the bitterly cold night journey over the mountain from Mori to Riva. Such practical inspirations could put him into a happy mood for the whole day. Altogether let it not be imagined that Brahms was dependent upon others or unpractical when travelling. Only one thing was difficult to him, that was to find his way about a town, even one he had often

visited. On the other hand he possessed great dexterity in the use of the railway guide, and soon found out the most convenient combination of trains for a cross-country journey. He also was very quick in grasping any dilemma in which the traveller may be placed upon arriving at station or hotel, and made his decisions promptly and with great presence of mind. I frequently had to admire his correct judgment of our fellow-travellers, and altogether acknowledged that his demeanour when travelling was a fresh proof that artistic genius does not necessarily blunt the perceptions for the common things of life.

It was on this tour that we visited the picture gallery at Parma, and Brahms saw that picture by Parmigiano which charmed him so greatly. Cremona, though rather off the beaten track, was also one of our chief resting-places on this journey. Brahms showed particular interest in this town, so renowned through its violin makers. We stayed at the little Hotel Pavone, and soon discovered that the young landlord was also a *parruchiere*, that is a barber, and, like his famous colleague of Seville, a general factotum, as he was an excellent violinist, played in the principal orchestra, and gave private lessons on the violin. It was Good Friday, and until late in the evening he practised his part for the

Easter Mass in the cathedral on the following day.

The same evening, as we were strolling about the streets under brilliant moonlight, upon turning a corner we suddenly found ourselves opposite the cathedral, and Brahms was quite overwhelmed by the sight of the beautiful marble façade with its fabulously romantic outline. It certainly is one of the most original edifices in Italy; begun in 1107, completed in the 16th century, a wild symphony in stones, a piece of emotional architecture executed in bold and mighty forms. The protruding front, supported by pillars, with its balcony of white marble, certainly contributes to this impression, and the whole façade is richly sculptured. Next to the cathedral rises the gloomy and gigantic Torrazzo, the highest tower in Italy. Brahms could hardly tear himself away from this beautiful sight, and, returning there later that same evening, we watched the magical effects of the moonlight on this mighty pile, as it glided over the marble surface and statues, the shadowy Torrazzo seeming to reach unto the heavens, the dark shadows in the vaulted porch alternating with bright patches of moonlight, the statues looking like the living figures of a dream of bygone days.

In the presence of all this beauty, Brahms was glad to recall that Claudio Monteverde, 'the Father of the Opera,' was born at Cremona, where a street now bears his name. And the following day, when, in the beautiful Gothic church of San Agostino, he discovered a statue of Saint Joachim, he jokingly remarked, in affectionate allusion to his oldest friend, 'That is quite fitting, that there should be a monument to Joachim in the venerable city of violins.'

We heard early Mass in the old church of San Sigismondo, situated about three-quarters of an hour outside the town, where once upon a time Bianca Visconti was married to the powerful Sforza. At ten o'clock we were present at the great choral Mass in the cathedral, which was celebrated by the archbishop. The mass was the composition of a Cremonese musician, named Andreotti, a man of such small stature that he hardly reached up to an ordinary table. Brahms thought that, considering this circumstance, his melodies were surprisingly cheerful. It especially amused us that, after the tenor solo, sung by a popular opera singer, the audience, quite oblivious of their surroundings, broke out into a more than whispered 'Bravo.'

On the same journey we visited Brescia,



Vicenza, Padua, and finally returned to Verona, whence Brahms went home to Vienna alone. One result of restricting this tour to a small area was that we had more time for quiet enjoyment, and could take things leisurely, which was more conducive to pleasant intercourse than much travelling. On this tour Brahms frequently spoke of his own compositions, a subject on which he was generally most reticent. The 'Zigeuner Lieder' (Gipsy Songs) had just been published; and Brahms discoursed at length on the question as to what poems were or were not suitable for composition, flavouring his remarks with an occasional hit at those musicians who followed his example in taking words by Goethe or Schiller, but, not having made a happy selection, the result left much to be desired. He seemed to have a cheap edition of his works, a real people's edition, much at heart. It also gave him evident pleasure to see his sonatas for pianoforte in the window of a very modest-looking music-shop at Padua.

In the spring of 1893 I started with Brahms on our third journey to Italy, which proved to be his last visit to that lovely land, which always had such a magnetic attraction for him. Brahms was also hoping thus to avoid the celebration of his sixtieth birthday. Not that

he was ever indifferent to any tokens of affection or respect offered him! On the contrary, even when at the height of his fame, he always showed a naïve delight in any homage that came upon him unexpectedly. But still he preferred to avoid a possible banquet or solemn deputations. And as in every case he longed to re-visit Sicily—for he agreed that, as Goethe wrote to Madame de Stein, 'Italy without Sicily is an incomplete picture, for here is the key to everything'—a journey thither seemed to offer the most suitable alternative.

This time two musicians from Zürich, friends of both Brahms and myself, were of the party, Dr Friedrich Hegar the conductor, and the pianist Robert Freund. We met Brahms at Milan, intending to embark at Genoa. But upon arriving at the port of Genoa, on the 16th April, we found the only ship bound for Sicily was an Hungarian one; whereupon Brahms remarked, with a joking hit at the Hungarian origin of Robert Freund, that although, according to the 'Winter's Tale,' the Bohemians were a seafaring nation, this assertion had not yet been made with regard to the Hungarians. And so we went by rail to Naples.

Professor Ed. Hanslick was then staying with his wife at Sorrento, and thither we went to visit him. It was a lovely, warm, spring day

and the dolphins were playing in the waves of the Bay of Naples, as they had done in days of yore, in the wake of Arion's ships. After a hearty welcome from his old friend, Brahms spent a pleasant day in the orange garden on the high rocks above the sea. When we were at table, someone proposed to drink champagne, but Brahms, seizing hold of his mighty fiasco of Chianti, refused to hear of any other wine; whereupon Hanslick called out to us that now he really could give the world some news about Brahms: 'Gran fiasco di Brahms!' Among the guests at the Albergo Vittoria was also Schulhoff, the pianist, who, though in indifferent health, yet enjoyed participating in our unconstrained conversation. And autograph collectors reaped a good harvest that afternoon.

On the next evening we sailed for Sicily on board the *Oddone*, a steamer of the Florio-Rubbatino Company. Former experiences had taught Brahms that, in spite of his Hamburg birth, he could not be sure of having such a good appetite on sea as on land; but this time he was soon at ease on this subject, as we had the finest crossing imaginable, on which even the most nervous of ladies could not have been ill. We spent the greater part of the night on deck, and Brahms was able, for the first time, to enjoy the peculiar charm of a night voyage. Behind

the ship was a track of phosphorescent ripples, out of which fantastic shapes appeared now and again to flash into sight. Then came the wonderful sunrise, and at the same time the Bay of Palermo with Monte Pellegrino and the picturesque rocks of Cape Zaffarana appeared in view.

I enjoyed Sicily as a newcomer; but Brahms also was as interested in all around him as if this were his first visit. What pleasure he took in scanning the romantic scenes painted in bright colours upon the two-wheeled carts, especially if these pictures recalled episodes in the poems of Ariosto or Tasso! He never tired of praising the craving for beauty of a people who paint even the spokes of every peasant's waggon, and decorate every cross-bar with angels' heads, flowers, or, at least, tinsel, whilst the largest surface of the vehicle exhibits a dramatic representation of a scene out of the Bible, some legend, classical national poem, or event in history. The splendid harness of the very draught-horses, towers of brass with half-moons, stars and bells on the horses' collars—all came in for a share of his admiration.

From Palermo we went to Girgenti, where we stayed at the Albergo Belvedere, the windows and balconies of which command a view on the steep descent to the plain, and

the wonderful ancient temples by the sea. Two mornings we spent among the awe-inspiring ruins; where the sight of Brahms sitting on the lowest steps of the Temple of Juno, his bare head and silvery beard illuminated by the morning sun, involuntarily brought to my mind that Grecian tragic poet of whom the legend tells how, when staying here as a friend of Theron, the noble ruler of Agrigentum, he met his death, when nearly seventy years old, through a curious occurrence, whilst he was sitting by the sea; an eagle soaring aloft dropped a tortoise upon his head.

Then on to Catania and Syracuse, with its catacombs and underground prisons, Arethusa's Spring, and the grave of Platen, which Brahms, who had set to music several of his poems (for instance, 'Wie rafft ich mich auf in der Nacht, in der Nacht') did not wish to leave unvisited.

From Syracuse we went to Brahms's favourite spot, Taormina, where once he had spent some happy April days with his friend Billroth. A letter from Billroth to Hanslick, written during that sojourn, which the latter has kindly placed at my disposal, consists only of exclamations of delight—'Five hundred feet above the murmuring waves! Full moon! Intoxicating scent of orange blossoms, red cactus blooming as luxuriantly on the huge, picturesque rocks as

moss does with us! Forests of palms and lemons, Moorish castles, well-preserved Greek theatre! The broad line of snow-clad Etna, the pillar of fire! Add to this a wine called Monte Venere! Above all *Johannes in ecstasy*. And I, roused to such a pitch of excitement as to boldly sing bits out of his quartetts! If only you were with us, you dear old Hans!’

On this second visit, Brahms’s delight with Taormina was as great as ever; above all, he enjoyed the hours we spent in the ancient theatre. One day we ascended the hill to Mola, the former city of the Saracens, perched on rocky pinnacles. Uphill walking was rather a difficulty with Brahms; but his downhill pace resembled that of a rolling ball, and his companions frequently found it hard work to keep up with him, as was also the case with us that afternoon, as we were returning from Mola. Brahms was far ahead, and, missing the way, found himself upon the edge of a quarry down which he clambered, and probably would not have reached the bottom safe and sound, had not a man, who was working close by, seen him and come to his aid. When we met him again at Taormina, Brahms was not at all pleased with himself, but blamed himself for imprudence and clumsiness. I only mention this little incident in order to show that, if

Brahms could sometimes be hard and severe to others, he was none the less so to himself.

But fortunately it was I, and not Brahms, who was destined to end this journey with an accident. In the harbour of Messina, on board the *Asia*, which was to take us back to Naples, I was struck upon the shoulder by a heavy piece of luggage, which the crane was about to lower into the hold of the ship, into which I should also have been precipitated had not my left foot caught in an iron ring, thus saving me from what would have been a fatal fall, though the sudden jerk and strain resulted in a broken foot. Nevertheless I continued the journey, only staying two days in Naples, in order to have the foot put into plaster of Paris.

Thus it happened that Brahms did indeed spend the 7th of May, his sixtieth birthday, in complete seclusion, namely, by my bedside in the capacity of faithful nurse and guardian; both other friends having been persuaded by us to go that day to Pompeii, which they had never seen. It is impossible for me to describe with what care, kindness and devotion Brahms tended me. The treatment I had to undergo at the hands of the surgeon, though not very painful for me, excited him terribly; but he struggled to control his feelings and conceal them by making jocular remarks, such as, 'I am your man when

it comes to cutting; I was always Billroth's assistant in such things.' When we were alone, he cared for my comfort like a trained nurse, and endeavoured by cheerful talk to keep up my spirits. 'Just think,' he would say to me, 'how many tours you have been on foot in the Alps and in Italy, so that, even if in the worst case you should be unable to do so in the future, you at any rate have the advantage over hundreds of thousands of fellow-creatures who have been less fortunate.' He also advised me, after it had been decided that I was to travel home next day, not to make my wife uneasy by despatching a telegram.

Whilst he was sitting beside me, every now and again telegrams congratulating him on his birthday arrived; from the Duke of Meiningen, for instance, and other friends, who, with this object, had written to one or the other of us for information as to our probable whereabouts on that day. Brahms was delighted to receive them, and I noticed how the receipt of these messages intensified his desire to return to Vienna, and to the circle of his friends.

But it was not until after he had seen me, accompanied by Dr Hegar, safely into the train which, in an unbroken journey of thirty-six hours, was to convey me to Berne, that Brahms entered the other train, which was to take him and



Freund to Vienna *viâ* Ancona. In his parting words he conjured me, if all went well, not to let this accident rob me of my inclination for future tours with him in Italy. And when I reached home, I found a post-card awaiting me, which he had written in Venice ; it contained the same wish, as did many another letter.

I speedily recovered ; and it certainly was not the recollection of this untoward incident that prevented me from undertaking another tour in Italy with Brahms. But other circumstances intervened ; and thus our Sicilian trip proved to be the last that I took with Brahms in Italy, and also his final visit to that beautiful country which he had loved so well.

## CHAPTER V

### THE LAST YEARS

ON the 2nd of May 1889 Brahms wrote :—

‘DEAR FRIEND,—It is a plaintive minor chord that I strike to-day, which I hope will not sound more cheerful to you than it does to me ; I have taken rooms in Ischl for the summer. What I seek and wish for there you know, but perhaps not what I shall miss. Among other things, or, rather, above all, each Saturday I shall feel a pang at the thought that no train goes to Berne.’

What Brahms sought and found in Ischl was the vicinity of his Viennese friends, whom, except for an occasional visitor, he had greatly missed during the three summers at Thun. For, although he found quiet and solitude necessary for his work, his was in reality a sociable nature. Relying on his oft-tested ingenuity in quickly and easily disposing of unwelcome and importunate visitors, he felt no fear of Ischl on that score, crowded though it

is all summer with Viennese, but rather was pleased not to be condemned to the frequent lonely evenings of Thun.

It will easily be understood that in this new departure I seemed to hear the echo of our political dispute of the previous summer, and was saddened by it. The part I had played appeared to me like that of the foolish peasant in the fable, who, by a thoughtless word, drove away the guardian angel of his house. But the cases were not really parallel. In the course of that controversy Brahms had become fully aware of his own sensitiveness in matters of political opinion, and therefore it could not be pleasant for him to live in a land where he constantly ran the risk of being wounded in his patriotic feelings, though never again through my fault—of that he was assured. In fact, during the two following years, the last in which Bismarck held the office of Chancellor, certain events caused a tension between Switzerland and her mighty neighbour, which betrayed itself by an irritable sensitiveness on the part of the people of the small State, which felt aggrieved, and even seriously threatened. This condition of ferment made me glad that Brahms did not come to Switzerland during those years, as his feelings might have been hurt by many a conversation overheard at a restaurant.

However, I was to have the pleasure of seeing him all the same. When the tour in Italy planned for the spring fell through, owing to family affairs calling me to North Germany, Brahms invited me to join him in the autumn of the same year at Baden-Baden, which invitation I gladly accepted. There he was living, according to his usual custom, not in one of the big hotels but in the 'Bären,' a comfortable inn in the Lichtenthal Allee, where he could sit in his shirt-sleeves on a bench in the garden and enjoy his cigarette without being an object of remark. The room which he had ordered for me was next to his, on the ground floor. The wet weather not allowing us to undertake long excursions, we spent many hours in conversation leaning out of our respective windows; and some of these talks impressed themselves upon my memory, both on account of the subjects under discussion, and of the confidential tone in which Brahms spoke.

At that time a letter which Brahms had written to his father many years before, and which evidently had fallen into wrong hands, was offered for sale in the catalogue of a Berlin auctioneer as a 'detailed letter of Johannes Brahms to his father,' but it was immediately bought by a friend, who handed it back to Brahms. This little episode gave him occasion

to speak of biographical indiscretions; in his opinion the chief consideration, in the selection of material for a biography of an artist or author, should be whether the facts in question were of a nature to make the artist, whom we love and honour in his Art, also win our esteem as a man; as, for instance, is the case in such a high degree with Schiller and Goethe, partly also with Mozart, whilst, through the recent publication of certain letters hitherto unknown, our mental image of Beethoven has been disfigured by features so unwelcome that it would have been preferable to have been kept in ignorance of them. As I had not the shadow of a doubt that the friend beside me, apparently in the most perfect health and strength, would certainly long outlive me, I naturally accepted these remarks as having no practical bearing upon my relation to him; but now I perceive in them a plea for the publication of this little volume. For the attraction of *his* personality can certainly only increase the more one penetrates below the crust of his rugged manliness, and of the somewhat repellent impression made upon strangers by his occasional bluntness.

Among other matters he also mentioned that, having no near relatives alive, he ought to make some arrangement for disposing of his property,

and consulted me as to what in my opinion would be the right way of doing so. My reply that there was really no hurry about this he thrust aside as one of those unreasoning conventionalities with which in such cases one endeavours to deceive oneself and others; I was not to say such things, but give him a definite answer to his question. Thereupon I suggested a fund to assist poor students of music, but this idea was immediately refuted.

The universal law of the struggle for existence, from which no part of creation is exempt, results not only in the selection of those who, being strong enough to overcome every impediment, most nearly attain perfection, but also in the rejection of the weakest, and is as necessary in Art as in every other phase of life. The result of endowments and similar help is to produce a certain feeble mediocrity, to say nothing of the frequent mistakes made by the trustees of such funds in their selection of candidates! It is not the young artist of true originality who reaps the benefit of these advantages, for by virtue of his very genius he is, as a rule, in opposition to the existing views on Art, and therefore in his early days, at least, is generally both misunderstood and underrated. However, such neglect and want of recognition do not really harm strong natures, but, on the contrary,

deepen them, and create a healthy indignation and firm determination to overcome the opposition of the world.

And then, going on to speak of his own youth, he said emphatically that he could not wish it to have been less beset with difficulties and privations. It is true he had had at first to earn his bread by arranging marches and dances for open-air bands or some similar means; but even now it gave him pleasure, when he accidentally came across one of these youthful efforts still circulating anonymously in the world, to find that he had done even such quill-driving with all his might and according to the knowledge that he then possessed. He even did not consider it a useless discipline of life that he had sometimes had to accompany the singers at a *café chantant* or play dance-music, whilst all the time longing for the quiet morning hour when he could put his own thoughts on paper. 'The best songs came into my head whilst brushing my boots before dawn!' And, delighting to recall the days of his youth, he went on to describe his bliss when he, a little boy of hardly six years, for the first time discovered the possibility of making a melody visible to the eye by placing black dots on lines at different intervals: 'I invented a system of notation before I knew that one had already long been in existence!'

Returning to the question of the will, he added that he had already made one, but had withdrawn it in order to effect some alterations, and now he knew what the end would be. This matter, which could be settled in an hour, is put off in an irresponsible manner in the thought that there will always be an opportunity for doing it. But, strangely enough, this opportunity never comes, because the subject is rendered distasteful by its connection with death. However, feeling how wrong this was, when he returned to Vienna he would certainly bring himself to do his duty in this respect. But, as is well known, he never did execute a will in the form required by the law.

During those autumn days Brahms procured me a great pleasure by introducing me to Madame Schumann, then also staying at Baden-Baden. It was with feelings of deep emotion that I approached this noble woman, who was for me the embodiment of the most beautiful phase of German romanticism—namely, the musical—as well as of a period so remote that it seemed to me like a dream to be allowed the privilege of taking the hand, which in 1840 had been laid before the altar in that of Robert Schumann. And that period, with its high and tender ideals, seemed to survive in the fine spiritualised countenance of the old lady, on which, in spite of



many sorrows, lay the expression of that never-fading youth which only clings to the perfectly good and pure. Although in repose her face bore a somewhat anxious look, when she smiled it shone with a wonderful expression of combined brightness and sweetness, so rejuvenating that involuntarily her maiden name, 'Clara Wieck,' arose in my mind. And this impression was never obliterated, though in the succeeding years I frequently had the privilege of seeing Madame Schumann, as she regularly spent the last summers of her life at Interlaken.

It may be imagined what an ideal friendship existed between her and Brahms, based, as it was, upon the deep and sacred memories they had in common. How much joy, how much sorrow they had shared together! In the sad time of Robert Schumann's mental darkness and after his death, Brahms was the energetic friend and defender of the widow, who was often sorely pressed and in need of a faithful adviser.

I believe that Brahms himself regarded Madame Schumann as the noblest of her sex. 'When you have written something,' he once said to me, 'ask yourself whether such a woman as Madame Schumann could read it with pleasure. If you doubt that, then cross out what you have written.' He looked up to her with reverence

as a son, but as a son who, with his practical experience of life, may presume to give his mother advice. They called each other by the familiar 'thou,' and by their Christian names, and a whole world of hearty mutual understanding lay in this 'Johannes' and 'Clara.'

It filled Brahms with joyful pride to see how great an impression Madame Schumann had made upon me. And from Vienna he wrote to me on November 14th, 1889 :—

'I wish we could repeat the days in Baden next year. . . . You would then, I hope, also see Madame Schumann again, and that alone is worth the journey. That this noble woman should make such an impression upon you, is just what I should have expected of *you*, but all the same it gave me great pleasure.'

From Baden-Baden I accompanied Brahms to Carlsruhe, where we spent some pleasant days with Professor Wendt and other friends, not omitting a visit to the Picture Gallery for the sake of the paintings by Feuerbach, which Brahms greatly admired.

When the autumn of 1890 came, I found it impossible to go to Baden-Baden; but a vigorously - sustained correspondence between Brahms and myself kept us well in touch with

one another. Not only my family affairs but also political events in Switzerland were discussed by Brahms, in humorous or serious strains as the case might be.

In the canton of Ticino a small revolution had ended by placing the Radicals at the helm.

‘Your Ticino affairs,’ wrote Brahms (September 27th, 1890), ‘of course interest me in my capacity of brother-in-law, and I am curious as to whether the priests will get the upper hand now, or only later on.’

The ‘brother-in-law’ refers to the fact that my elder daughter had recently married a Ticinese, and, as has already been mentioned, Brahms used in fun to call himself the betrothed of my youngest. As regards the danger of the Ultramontane influence gaining the ascendancy, Brahms was always pessimistic on this subject; or at least when told of a Liberal victory appeared not to believe in it, his fear being that by over-confidence on the part of the Liberals, they might play into their enemies’ hands.

As is well known, Brahms was very sparing of news about his own work. This was due not so much to a love of secretiveness, as to the conviction that a fruitful interchange of opinion on this subject was only possible for him with a

thorough musician. On the other hand, he used sometimes to write to me about his texts, drawing my attention to any peculiarities in them.

The 'Festival and Commemoration Sentences' ('Fest und Gedenksprüche') for eight-part chorus had just been published when in March 1890 he wrote to me:—

'Have you noticed the theological, even jesuitical subtlety of the second of the sentences? I really wanted to ask you before now, whether such a thing is permissible. (St Luke xi. 17 and 21). Do look it up some time as it will interest you.'

The point was, that the two verses, 'Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation,' and 'When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace,' refer in the Gospel of St Luke, as shown by the context, to the Kingdom of Darkness, and the 'strong man' is Satan himself; whilst, in the 'Festival and Commemoration Sentences,' Brahms makes these verses, and indeed the whole of the text, clearly refer to Germany's prosperity and military power. For, from the opening words, 'Our fathers trusted in Thee,' to the words of warning at the close, 'Only take

heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons'—this free handling of biblical words for a choral work is but a fresh proof of that depth of patriotic feeling of which I have already spoken.

In the following year (1891), the 'Festival and Commemoration Sentences' were given at the cathedral at Berne at a festival held to commemorate the 700th anniversary of the foundation of the town. Brahms was invited to conduct his work at the festival, but declined in the following amusing letter, written from Ischl on a telegraph form:—

'I have promised to sigh telegraphically if I do not come. So here goes! Oh, dear! Ah! Oh! *ad libitum*. The reason? It is true the severity of the festival regulation, that broken carriage windows must be paid for, rather scared me, but still it would not have kept me away if I could have got straight into one of those same carriages, instead of first sitting for twenty hours in the train. But seriously, I am very sorry to be absent from this festival, which is so perfectly to my taste. I hope you will find some good-looking musician, with fair curling locks, who

would enter still more into the spirit of the thing than your  
J. B.'

I must yet mention an incident which also occurred in 1890, because, on the one hand, it shows how great was Brahms's admiration for Gottfried Keller, and, on the other, illustrates a particularly amiable trait in his character, namely, his desire to let his friends share his intellectual pleasures. On the 8th December I received eight pages of quotations from letters of Gottfried Keller, which Brahms had copied out for me; a laudable performance for one who had so great a distaste to occupying himself for long with pen and ink. Although aware that these letters would later on find a place in Baechtold's *Life of Gottfried Keller*, he was anxious that I should know his favourite passages without delay. In the accompanying note he writes:—

'I have copied them only for your sake. From three collections of letters, as you see; they belong to Professor Exner, and are addressed to him, his sister and E. Kuh. The difference in tone is most charming; the stupidest jokes for the young beauty, and half a history of literature for the literary men,' etc.

How it would have touched Keller, had he

known what trouble the Viennese musician, whom he so greatly admired, had given himself with those old letters!

I must here remark that Brahms and Keller were also personally acquainted. In the autumn of 1882, I myself was a witness of their first meeting, which took place at a restaurant, and saw how well they fraternised from the very first. They had much in common, apart from the fact that each was a perfect master in his sphere of Art; their bachelor state, for instance, and the consequent necessity of passing a part of their time in restaurants and clubs. Other points of resemblance were the simplicity, the absolute straightforwardness and sincerity of these two men; as also the self-reliance which, in their early days, had enabled them to meet the coldness and indifference of the public. It was delightful to see how these two men of genius seemed to understand one another, and to watch their animated conversation; which was all the more remarkable as Keller was usually laconic and even disagreeable towards strangers.

In the next years (1891 and 1893) I saw Brahms in quite different surroundings in the ducal palace at Meiningen. I need not here dwell upon the circumstances that led me thither, important though they were for me; I must only add

that I had to thank Brahms's oft-tested friendship for the first invitation. He, himself, had long been the favourite guest of the music-loving ducal pair, and often went to Meiningen for performances of one or other of his new compositions by the excellent orchestra under Steinbach's baton; there he also delighted in the playing of that perfect clarionettist, Mühlfeld. But above all it was the high-minded liberty of thought, prevailing at this Court of the Muses, which gave him so much pleasure, not to omit the great friendship evinced towards him by the duke and duchess, and which found expression in numberless delicate attentions.

Although, with his great tact and knowledge of the world, Brahms felt at his ease in every society, still he would not have submitted willingly to the restraints of etiquette at a ceremonious court, as not only his natural independence, but also his constantly increasing need of a certain unconventional comfort, would have made it too distasteful to him. He once said to me that the chief reason why he declined the most pressing invitations to England was that 'one has almost to live in a dress suit and white tie.'

In this matter what was expected at Meiningen, at least from such a man as Brahms, did not exceed what is customary in all good



society in Germany. On the other hand, it gave Brahms pleasure, being in such contrast with his habitual simplicity of life, to see himself surrounded by such princely splendour; the magnificent apartments, the tastefully-arranged table, the beautiful and elegant artistic furniture, tapestries, pictures, etc., all were bound to please an artist's eye. For instance, it was interesting to see the silver bell presented by Cardinal de Guise to Mary Queen of Scots in daily use at table. And though it was usually no slight effort for Brahms to don gala dress, still here he enjoyed appearing at the festive table in the splendour of his many Orders; and this did not seem to me in contradiction of his plebeian principles, but rather a confirmation of the same, as such decorations and the accompanying honours were in his eyes but the tribute paid to genius, that nobility of the mind which is just as much a gift of God as any high birth—honours which, in former days, had been denied to a Mozart and a Schubert as sons of the people. This is no vague supposition of mine, as I know from several observations he made, that such was Brahms's feeling on this point. For instance, he once remarked, speaking of the almost princely honours showered on Wagner, that the position of every musician had been raised thereby to a higher plane, 'and although he had the lion's

share, yet all have indirectly reaped the benefit.'

Thus Brahms enjoyed the splendour and attention by which he was surrounded in Meiningen; not that he gave it more than a passing thought, for his mind was filled with the truer pleasures which were offered him, at the same time, in the warm friendship of the duke and his wife, and the delightful musical life, which, beginning with a morning concert, was frequently continued in the duke's private apartments until late in the night. On such occasions an almost Olympic cheerfulness shone in his sparkling eyes. He vented his high spirits in all sorts of jests and banter, some of them at my expense; one of these being that, each morning, he would feel my pulse in order to test 'whether the thick, sluggish blood of the republican had not yet changed into the thin, swift current that flows in the veins of the courtier!' In short, whilst in Meiningen, his high spirits and cheerfulness of mind knew no bounds; and his noble host and hostess rejoiced to see this, and to feel that it was in their power to afford pleasure to such a man as Brahms; so these days at Meiningen were bathed in sunshine as in the golden age, of which the princess in 'Tasso' indeed says that it had never existed; was but a sweet dream of the poet; but also allows that the

good can bring it back, 'where kindred souls meet and share the enjoyment of this beautiful world.'

I cannot here relate how the friendship of the duke and duchess for Brahms continued until the end; but one characteristic act I may be allowed to mention, as Brahms himself, in the last months of his life, spoke of it with grateful emotion. The duchess sent Brahms a pair of slippers she had worked for him. In order to be sure that he, then already ailing, should not trouble to write a letter of thanks, she enclosed a post-card ready addressed to herself, on which he needed only to acknowledge in a few words the receipt of the parcel.

April and May 1893 brought the journey to Sicily, which was to be Brahms's last visit to Italy.

In the following year we found it impossible to meet, for which our correspondence afforded me some compensation; though the tone of some of Brahms's letters was at times depressed, as the illness and death of his friend Billroth weighed on his spirits. But it was characteristic with him not to brood over sad events, but rather to find out their brighter sides. Thus in two letters he described with pleasure the demeanour of the Viennese people at Billroth's funeral.

'I wish you could have seen, as I did, what it means to be beloved *here*. Really, the

Viennese do know how to express their love and veneration, in a way of which you Swiss are quite incapable. You are not so expansive in the exhibition of your affections as we are here, and this is especially true of the best part of the people (I mean the gallery).'

And in the next letter he writes :—

‘I cannot refrain from again writing about my dear Viennese. A funeral has always a great attraction for them, but here, among that enormous crowd, you would not have seen a single indifferent or inquisitive face; on all sides only an expression of deepest sympathy and affection. That did me good, both as I strolled through the streets and at the cemetery.’

About this time Klinger’s etching, ‘Brahms Fantasias,’<sup>1</sup> appeared, and gave Brahms the keenest delight.

‘They are perfectly fascinating, and seem to be intended to make one forget all the miserable things of this world, and to lift one into higher spheres. The more one studies them with the eye the more the mind seems to discern their inner meaning.’

<sup>1</sup> Imaginative representation of Brahms’s ‘Intermezzi and Fantasias for Pianoforte.’—*Trans. Note.*

And in another letter, written about the same time, he passes in review those contemporaries whose works he most admires. Allgeyer's book on the painter Anselm Feuerbach had just appeared, also the collection of prints of Böcklin's works, and the *Fantasias* of Klinger already alluded to.

'These three fill house and heart,' writes Brahms, 'and really one cannot call those times evil, which produce such a trio, not to mention those of your craft such as Freytag, Keller and Heyse—and as Menzel just comes into my mind, I realise how luxuriously we live, and how superficially we calculate.'

Friends and students of modern German literature will perceive from this enumeration that Brahms was decidedly conservative in his taste. Still it is but fair to add, that this same conversatism did not prevent him from at least getting to know all that was written. He read modern literature in the hope of finding it good and great, and until the last never missed the first performance of any new play of importance, even accusing himself of too great a curiosity in this respect. 'As you know, I have the fatal habit of wanting to know and to read everything imaginable,' begins a letter in which he sends

me some impressions of performances at the Burgtheater, Vienna, during the winter of 1894. And if, notwithstanding this interest, he did not succeed in doing justice to certain important literary productions of the present day, may one not justly remember how frequently a great poetical genius is unable to realise the true worth of a contemporary in the field of music. One remembers the distrust with which Goethe, under Zelter's influence, at first regarded Beethoven; and how, when Schubert sent him the 'Erlking,' he so misjudged him as to think him unworthy of an answer. In this respect the greatest and best frequently have limitations, due to the natural propensities and antipathies of their nature.

Brahms's aim in his creative work was the attainment of harmonious beauty, combined with perfect form and purity of feeling, transfiguring everything commonplace into a lofty peace and calm. In modern literature he found too little of this idealism, and it seemed to him too full of ferment and intricacies. But though not in sympathy with this modern tendency, he was careful not to pronounce a hard judgment upon it. And if he had once gone so far as to utter some critical word on this subject, he would modestly add, 'But that is only my own feeling; you know I do not profess to understand anything about it.'

When, in the spring of 1895, I was obliged to write to Brahms that the state of my health did not permit me to accompany him on his proposed journey to Italy, he replied with somewhat biting sarcasm, 'Really, you are too often reminded of the frailty of our machinery, and one cannot blame you, if you do not attach much importance to the resurrection of all flesh.'

Brahms himself was yet in the full enjoyment of his strength, and thus I found him, when, in the autumn of that year, we met at Zürich, on the occasion of the opening of the new concert hall (Tonhalle). Not one of us had a presentiment that this was to be our last meeting. We stayed with Dr Hegar, the conductor. Brahms himself conducted his wonderful 'Triumphlied,' several of his concerted works and songs being also given. Joachim, Haussmann, and other friends and artists assisted at the various performances. The whole town was in a state of joyful excitement, for Zürich—thanks to Hegar—has long been the most musical town in Switzerland. Brahms was the central figure of the festival, and all delighted to do him honour. He could not fail to be sensible of this homage, of which he also saw an illustration in the fact that his own portrait adorned the concert hall, side by side with that of Beethoven and the other great musicians.

It was amidst thundering applause that Brahms stepped on the platform to conduct his great work. His pleasure at the success of the performance was so great that, contrary to his usual habit, on our way home from the concert he himself began to speak of his work. Drawing my attention to several details in it, he asked me whether I had observed how, in the second chorus, when the hymn, 'Now thank we all our God,' begins, at the same time all the bells ring out victory, and a festive *Te Deum* resounds through the land.

Brahms spent the evening at the house of a wealthy lover of music, who had also invited Joachim, Hegar, and the most musical of his fellow-citizens. One of the daughters of our host, with her friends, had improvised a little buffet on the staircase, where the half-fermented wine ('*Sauser*,') which is such a favourite drink in Eastern Switzerland, was the chief beverage. Here Brahms took up his head-quarters, and sat there laughing and joking with the young girls; only after midnight could he make up his mind to leave the gay circle.

When, the following day, before returning to Berne, I and my wife and daughter took leave of Brahms, he had an old edition of Hölty's Poems in his hands. As he laid it aside, I caught sight of the open page; it was



the poem 'Auftrag' ('Message'), which begins with the words,—

'Ihr Freunde, hänget, wenn ich gestorben bin,  
Die kleine Harfe hinter dem Altar auf—'<sup>1</sup>

But this verse did not awaken any sad forebodings in me, as might have been the case if there had been the least indication of failing strength in the appearance of my friend, that could have given me a presentiment that this was to be our last farewell. And yet there was a note of sadness in our parting words for which there was no apparent cause.

For during the following winter Brahms's letters were as cheerful and hopeful as ever. In March 1896 he renewed his usual tempting proposals for a journey to Italy.

'Do you not think of Italy for the spring, on account of your ears?'<sup>2</sup> On account of our legs, our eyes? Sitting (in Lucca, Amalfi, Baiae), walking, driving, it is all the same to me. But if you think of it, do say one word,' etc.

It then seemed to me impossible to consent to this, as, after a winter of fatiguing work, I

<sup>1</sup> My friends, when I am dead,  
Hang the little harp behind the altar—'

<sup>2</sup> An allusion to an affection of the ear from which I was suffering.

indeed felt the need of a change, but also saw that I must be alone in order to enjoy the perfect rest so necessary for my health. It is true, had I been able to foresee what was to come, no personal consideration should have prevented me from accepting this proposal.

On the 20th May the death of Madame Schumann took place. It is well known that Brahms, who journeyed to Frankfort for the funeral, endeavoured to attribute the origin of his illness to the great inconvenience he had suffered on the journey, through the lateness of the trains—he would not allow that it might be ascribed to the mental shock, but in reality the organic trouble must have already commenced.

In June Brahms sent me his last work, the four serious songs on biblical texts, of which three treat of the universality and bitterness of death, only yielding to consolatory thoughts in that death appears as the angel of deliverance from poverty and all affliction. Many will probably believe, in spite of facts to the contrary, that the death of Madame Schumann on the one hand, and on the other a foreboding of his own approaching end, led to the musician's choice of such solemn texts for his last composition. Max Kalbeck has, however, proved the error of the first of these conjectures in his fine article, 'Musikalische Frühlingstage,' ('Musical Spring

Days') in No. 171 of the *Neue Wiener Tageblatt*, in which he writes that, as early as the 7th May, Brahms showed him the completed manuscript of the four songs, with the words: 'This is what I have given myself for my birthday.' And if these words appear to point to a presentiment of approaching death, this interpretation is also mistaken. For, as is well known to his immediate friends, even when his illness was far advanced, he made light of it. To me also he wrote in this strain in October 1896:—

'My indisposition need not make you in the least uneasy. It is quite a commonplace jaundice, which unfortunately has the idiosyncrasy of not wanting to leave me. But it has no further significance, as is affirmed by the doctors after all sorts of thorough examinations. Besides, I have not had pain or suchlike for a single day—nor even lost my appetite for a single meal, and in respect of diet I am now allowed full liberty. I like to think of your nice evenings at home, and wish I could sometimes join you in your cheerful chat.'

His last letter to me, in December 1896, was couched in the same cheerful strain, and free from any suspicion of a possible fatal issue to

his illness; indeed, he never even alluded to his condition of health. And there might have been a provocation for the expression of such a thought, as his letter was an acknowledgment of a poetical work I had sent him, in which, as in the 'Four Serious Songs,' emphasis was laid upon the common lot of man and beast, that of suffering pain and the bitterness of death. But Brahms, who received this poem ('Maikäfer Komödie') with particular pleasure, did not enter further into the strains of melancholy he found in it, and closed his letter only with words of general hearty approval.

That was his last greeting. When he did not send a word of thanks for the customary literary Christmas gifts for the sons of his landlady, I knew that things must be going badly with him. For, habitually, Brahms possessed in a high degree that princely courtesy, which consists not only in never being too late, but also in not leaving the slightest attention unacknowledged.

Then, when I heard from friends at Vienna that his condition was hopeless, but that this was kept secret from him as he seemed to cling so much to life—he had expressly requested the doctor 'on no account to tell him anything unpleasant'—I felt I must yet say some cheering word to him, if only by letter. And so I told

him about the wonderful recovery of an acquaintance of mine, a Mr B. of Zürich, who, after having twice undergone a serious operation in the larynx and, although given up by the doctors, had, contrary to all expectations, recovered so completely as even to be able to make a long speech in the Italian Club at Zürich in support of a law for the compensation of prisoners unjustly condemned. However, from the accounts I received from Viennese friends about that time, I doubt whether Brahms even read this letter ; and it would be a consolation for me to take this for granted as, in spite of the confident tone in which I wrote, I no longer dared to hope that in his case a recovery was possible.

On Saturday, the 3rd April, the telegram from Max Kalbeck arrived : ' Brahms fell asleep early this morning.'

All was over ! 'Ye now are sorrowful,' I said to myself, and grief and heaviness fell on my spirit, as a sudden gloom eclipses the brightness of day. Well knew I that the sorrow at such a loss could not be either mine alone, or that of any individual, but affected the whole world. But to me he was not only the great man—he was my friend, a faithful friend, to whom I owed an infinite debt. The world had not lost him, for such as he die unto immortality ; but from me, death had in very deed snatched

him utterly away. And so I could but sadly meditate on the vanished happiness—the unmerited happiness which, during so many years, had seemed to add a deeper significance to my life.

THE END

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